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HONORÉ DE BALZAC

(1799–1850)

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HONORÉ DE BALZAC

BY

ALBERT KEIM AND LOUIS LUMET

Translated from the French by

FREDERIC TABER COOPER

WITH SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS



NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
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September, 1914

GENERAL NOTE

Of all books perhaps the one best designed for training the mind and forming the character is "Plutarch." The lives of great men are object-lessons. They teach effort, devotion, industry, heroism and sacrifice.

Even one who confines his reading solely to biographies of thinkers, writers, inventors, poets of the spirit or poets of science, will in a short time have acquired an understanding of the whole History of Humanity.

And what novel or what drama could be compared to such a history? Accurate biographies record narratives which no romancer's imagination could hope to rival. Researches, sufferings, labors, triumphs, agonies and disasters, the defeats of destiny, glory, which is the "sunlight of the dead," illuminating the past, whether fortunate or tragic, such is what the lives of Great Men reveal to us, or, if the phrase be allowed, paint for us in a series of fascinating and dramatic pictures.

This series of biographies is accordingly in-

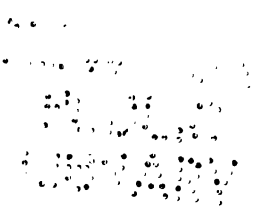
tended to form a sort of gallery, a museum of the great servants of Art, Science, Thought and Action.

It was Emerson who wrote a volume devoted to the Representatives of Humanity. Here we have still another collection of "Representative Men." This collection of profoundly interesting studies is entrusted to the care of two writers, Mr. Albert Keim and Mr. Louis Lumet, both of whom have already earned their laurels, the former as poet, novelist, playwright, historian and philosopher, and author of a definitive work upon Helvetius which deserves to become a classic, and the latter as publicist, art critic and scholar of rare and profound erudition. An acquaintance with the successive volumes in this series will give ample evidence of the value of such able collaborators.

On the mountain tops we breathe a purer and more vivifying air. And it is like ascending to a moral mountain top when we live, if only for a moment, with the dead who, in their lives did honour to mankind, and attain the level of those whose eyes now closed, once glowed like beacon-lights, leading humanity on its eternal march through night-time towards the light.

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HONORÉ DE BALZAC

(1799–1850)

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

CHAPTER I

THE TREATISE ON THE HUMAN WILL

AT Balzac's funeral, the glorious yet bitter seal upon his destiny, Victor Hugo delivered a magnificent address, and in his capacity as poet and seer proclaimed with assurance the judgment of posterity:

"His life has been brief yet full, and richer in works than in days.

"Alas! This powerful and indefatigable worker, this philosopher, this thinker, this poet, this genius has lived amongst us that life of storms, of struggles, of quarrels, of combats, which has always been the common lot of all great men. Today we see him at peace. He has escaped from controversies and enmities. He has entered, on the selfsame day, into glory

and into the tomb. Henceforward he will shine far above all those clouds which float over our heads, among the brightest stars of his native land."

This discourse was admirable for its truth, its justice and its far-sightedness, a golden palm branch laid upon the author's tomb, around which there still arose clamours and bitter arguments, denying the greatness of his works, and rumours which veiled the features of the man himself behind a haze of absurd legends. A star of his country he certainly was, as Victor Hugo proclaimed him, one of those enduring stars which time—so cruel to others—fails to change, except to purify their light and augment their brilliance, to the greater pride of the nation. His life was indeed short, but it was one which set a salutary example, because, stripped of idle gossip, it teaches us the inner discipline, the commanding will and the courage of this hero who, in the midst of joy and sorrow alike, succeeded in creating an entire world.

Honoré de Balzac was born at Tours on the

20th of March, 1799, on the ground floor of a building belonging to a tailor named Damourette, in the Rue de l'Armée d'Italie, No. 25,—now No. 35, Rue Nationale. The majority of his biographers have confused it with the dwelling which his father bought later on, No. 29 in the same street according to the old numbering, and the acacia which is there pointed out as having been planted at the date of his birth really celebrated that of his brother Henri, who was several years the younger.

Although born in Touraine, Balzac was not of Tourainian stock, for his birthplace was due merely to chance. His father, Bernard François Balssa or Balsa, came originally from the little village of Nougaire, in the commune of Montirat and district of Albi. He descended from a peasant family, small land-owners or often simple day labourers. It was he who first added a "c" to his patronymic and who later prefixed the particle for which the great novelist was afterwards so often reproached. Bernard Balssa, born July 22, 1746, left his native village at the age of fourteen years,

never to return. What was his career, and what functions did he fulfil? Honoré de Balzac says that his father was secretary to the Grand Council under Louis XV, and Laure Surville, his sister, wrote that under Louis XVI he was attorney to the Council. He himself, in an invitation to the marriage of his second daughter, Laurence, described himself as former secretary to the King's Council. During the revolution he was secretary to the minister of the navy, Bertrant de Molleville, and later was director of the commissary department in the first division of the Armée du Nord, stationed at Lille.

It is impossible to follow him through all the different wanderings necessitated by his functions, but it is known that upon returning to Paris he there married the daughter of one of his superior officers, Sallambier, attached to the Ministry of War and at the same time director of the Paris hospitals. At the time of the marriage, January 30, 1797, he was fifty-one years of age; his bride, Laure, was only eighteen, a young girl possessed of cul-

ture, beauty and distinction of manner. The first fruit of this union was a son, who, although nursed by the mother, died at an early age. Through the influence of his father-in-law, the elder Balzac obtained in 1799 the direction of the commissary department of the twenty-second military division, and installed himself at Tours, where the division was stationed, in the early months of the same year.

François soon had a reputation throughout the province. He was a sort of philosopher and reformer, a man with ideas. He despised the currently accepted opinions, and proclaimed his own boldly, indifferent to the consternation of his fellow townsmen. A large head emerging from the high, thick collar of his blue, white-braided coat, which opened to disclose an ample cravat, a smooth-shaven face and florid complexion, a powerful chin and full cheeks, framed in short, brown "mutton-chop" whiskers, a small mouth with thick lips, a long, straight, slightly bulbous nose, an energetic face lit up by black eyes, brilliant and slightly dreamy, beneath a broad, determined forehead

overhung with stray locks of hair, gathered back in the fashion of the Republic,—all these features proclaimed a rugged personality, a dominant character, conspicuously at variance with the placid bourgeoisie of Touraine. François Balzac had furthermore an agreeable presence and a self-satisfied manner, and it pleased him to boast of his southern origin.

The citizens of Tours spoke of him as "an eccentric," but he was greatly annoyed when the term reached his ears, for, good Gascon that he was, and proud of himself, body and mind, he felt that it was singularly humiliating to be treated with so little respect. In point of fact, he was quite justified in refusing to accept an appellation which, however well it might fit his manners as a well-intentioned fault-finder, caustic and whimsical in speech, in no way applied to his unusually broad and penetrating intelligence, teeming with new and strictly original ideas.

He was a disciple of Rousseau; he held certain social theories, and he was unsparing in his criticisms of existing governments. He had

his own views as to how society at large should be governed and improved. The first of these views consisted in cultivating mankind, by applying the method of eugenic selection to marriage, in such a manner that after a few years there would be no human beings left save those who were strong, robust and healthy. He could not find sufficient sarcasm to express his scorn of governments which, in civilised countries, allowed the development of weaklings, cripples and invalids. Perhaps he based his theory upon his own example. François Balzac had the constitution of an athlete and believed himself destined to live to the age of a hundred years and upward. According to his calculations, a man did not reach his perfect development until after completing his first century; and, in order to do this, he took the most minute care of himself. He studied the Chinese people, celebrated for their longevity, and he sought for the best methods of maintaining what he called the equilibrium of vital forces. When any event contradicted his theories, he found no trouble in turning it to his own advantage.

"He was never," related his daughter, Mme. Laure Surville, in her article upon Balzac, "under any circumstances at a loss for a retort. One day, when a newspaper article relating to a centenarian was being read aloud (an article not likely to escape notice in our family, as may well be imagined) he interrupted the reader, contrary to his habit, in order to say enthusiastically, 'There is a man who has lived wisely and has never squandered his strength in all sorts of excesses, as so many imprudent young people do!' It turned out, on the contrary, that this wise old man frequently became drunk, and that he took a late supper every evening, which, according to my father, was one of the greatest enormities that one could perpetrate against one's health. 'Well,' resumed my father imperturbably, 'the man has shortened his life, no doubt about it.' "

François Balzac was not to be shaken in his opinions. Furthermore, he was not satisfied with asserting them, in the course of conversation, but in spite of his lack of confidence in the influence of books upon prejudiced readers

(for he considered that the sole exception was the reaction against chivalry brought about by Cervantes's *Don Quixote*), he wrote a number of pamphlets in which the vigour and originality of his mind are revealed. He published successively: *An Essay regarding Two Great Obligations to be fulfilled by the French* (1804), *An Essay on the Methods of preventing Thefts and Assassinations* (1807), *A Pamphlet regarding the Equestrian Statue which the French People ought to raise to perpetuate the Memory of Henry IV* (1815), *The History of Hydrophobia* (1819), etc. In the first of these works François Balzac proposed that a monument should be raised to commemorate the glory of Napoleon and the French army. Might not that be almost called the origin of the Arc-de-Triomphe?

The singularities of François Balzac in no wise hurt him in the estimation of the inhabitants of Touraine. He served as administrator of the General Hospice from 1804 to 1812, and introduced there a practical reform in providing remunerative work for the old men. As an

attaché of the Mayor's office, he had the mayoralty offered him in 1808, but he refused it in order to consecrate himself entirely to the sick and convalescent.

At Tours the Balzac household led the life of prosperous bourgeois folk. The father had acquired a house with grounds and farm lands. The Balzacs entertained and were received in society. People enjoyed—perhaps with some secret smiles—the unexpected outbursts of the husband, and they liked him for his kindly ironies which had no touch of malice. As for the subtle and witty Madame Laure Balzac, who had preserved all the graces of the eighteenth century, she was found delightful by all those whom she admitted to the honour of entering her circle of acquaintances.

She was a young woman of distinguished manner, with a somewhat oval face and small, delicate features, overcast at times with a shade of melancholy. She had a somewhat distant manner which she redeemed by a gesture of charming welcome, or a gracious phrase. She was pious, but without bigotry, a mystic whose

religion was that of St. John, all gentleness and impulse. She read Swedenborg, St. Martin, and Jacob Boehm. She had an ardent and untrammelled imagination, but her character was firm. Her decisions were promptly taken and she knew how to enforce their execution. She was a woman of principle; she respected social rules and customs and demanded that the members of her family should observe them.

Four more children were born to this marriage, two sons and two daughters: Honoré, Laure, Laurence, and Henri, all of whom had widely different destinies. Laure became the wife of an engineer of bridges and highways, M. Midy de la Greneraye Surville, and was intimately associated with the life of her older brother, whom she survived down to 1854; Laurence died a few years after her marriage in 1821 to M. de Montzaigle; Henri, the youngest, went through divers ups and downs; but finding himself unable to achieve a position of independence, he finally went into exile in the Colonies.

Madame de Balzac's first son having died, as

was thought, in consequence of the mother's attempt to nurse him herself, Honoré was placed with a nurse in the country district outside of Tours. He remained there until four years of age, together with his sister Laure, and it is there, no doubt, that they formed that tender and trusting friendship which never wavered. When he returned to the paternal roof, Honoré was a plump, chubby-cheeked little boy with brown hair falling in masses of curls, a contented disposition and laughing eyes. People noticed him when out walking in his short vest of brown silk and blue belt, and mothers would turn around to say, "What a pretty child!"

Honoré was impulsive, with a heart overflowing with affection, but the training he received at home was rigorous and severe. Entrusted to the hands of servants, under the high and mighty surveillance of his governess, Mlle. Delahaye, he received from his father, who was already an old man, nothing more than an indulgent and often absent-minded affection, while, as for his mother, she carried out with

great firmness her theories regarding the relation between children and parents. She received hers each evening in her large drawing-room with cold dignity. Before kissing them she recapitulated all the faults they had committed during the day, which she had learned from the governess, and her reproofs were reinforced with punishments. Honoré never approached her without fear, repressing all his feelings and his need of affection. He suffered in secret. Then he would take refuge with his sister Laure, his only friend and comforter.

Before he was five years old he was sent to a day-school in Tours known as the Leguay Institution. He had a taste for reading, indeed it was more than a taste, it was a sort of mental starvation which made him throw himself hungrily upon every book he encountered. Otherwise, Honoré was frankly a mediocre and negligent. But concentrated in himself and deprived of the caresses which would have meant so much to him, he created a whole world out of his readings and sometimes gave glimpses of it to Laure by acting out before

her dramas and comedies of his own manufacture and of which he was the hero. His exuberance made him a good comrade; yet he also loved solitude. When alone, he could give himself up to the fantasies born of his own imagination, and he invented his own games and used to play upon a cheap toy violin made of red wood airs which he enjoyed to the point of ecstasy and of which no one else could bear the sound.

At the age of eight years and some months, on the 22d of June, 1807, Honoré entered a college school at Vendôme. It was an institution celebrated throughout the districts of central France and directed by the Oratorian Fathers. Prior to the Revolution, cadets used to be trained there for the army, and it had preserved the military severity of its discipline. After their admission, the pupils were never allowed outside vacations and never left its walls until their course of study was terminated. Honoré lived there until April 22, 1813,—and in *Louis Lambert* he has described his sufferings, his hopes and the tumultuous

and confused awakening of his genius, throughout those long years of convent-like imprisonment. He had passed from the cold discipline of the family circle, which had nevertheless been tempered by an atmosphere of kindliness, to the hard and impersonal discipline of the college school. The warm-hearted and melancholy child must needs undergo this second severe test, and he was destined to come out from it in a state of self-intoxication, a bewilderment of dreams and ideas.

The college buildings, surrounded by walls, contained everything that would seem calculated to render existence laborious and gloomy for the students. The latter were divided into four sections, the Minions, the Smalls, the Mediums, and the Greats, to which they were assigned according to the grade of their studies. For diversion, they had a narrow garden which they could cultivate and a cabin; they had permission to raise pigeons and to eat them, in addition to the ordinary fare. The classrooms were dirty, being either muddy or covered with dust, according to the season, and evil-smelling

as a result of crowding together within narrow spaces too many young folks who were none too clean and to whom the laws of hygiene were unknown. The masters were either overbearing or neglectful, incapable of distinguishing the individual from the crowd and concerned only with seeing that the rules were obeyed and discipline maintained. The pupils themselves were often cruel to each other.

It was here that Honoré de Balzac formed his own character, alone, and suffered alone, sensitive and repressed child that he was. From the very first months of the sojourn in the College of Vendôme, he was classed among the apathetic and lazy pupils, among those of whom nothing could be made, who would never be an honour to the school that trained them and who could be ignored excepting for the purposes of punishment. Honoré had an insurmountable aversion for all the required tasks, he was indifferent to the charms of Greek themes or Latin translations, and history alone had the power of stirring him and awakening his appetite for knowledge. He was

habitually sluggish and stupid in the eyes of his masters, but what a formidable, unknown work was going on in the brain of this child!

We may picture him in the classroom, during study hour, leaning on his left elbow and holding an open book with his right hand, while he rubs his shoes, one against the other, with a mechanical movement. What is he reading? *Morality in Action and in Example.* His obscure desires are taking definite form. To become a great man, a hero, one of those whose names are transmitted from age to age, such from choice will be his own destiny. He seizes his pen and rapidly writes "Balzac, Balzac, Balzac" over all the white margins of the book on morality.* Then once more he leans upon his elbow, gazing out of the window at a corner of verdure which he can just glimpse, and forthwith he is off again in one of his interminable reveries.

The harsh voice of the teacher interrupts him:

*This book passed into the possession of M. Jules Claretie.

"You are doing nothing, M. Balzac."

The boy falls back from his dreams into the classroom. The reproof has hurt him keenly. He fixes his magnetic black eyes upon the teacher. Is it bitterness, disdain, or anger towards him for having destroyed those fruitful meditations? At all events, the teacher feels something like a shock. He says:

"If you look at me like that, M. Balzac, you will receive the ferrule."

The ferrule! The thong of leather that cut so painfully when it fell with dreaded rhythm, one, two, three, on the tips of the fingers or the palm of the hand.

Punishments rained heavily on Balzac, the bad pupil, who seems to have been perpetually in disgrace over his tasks and lessons. These punishments included the extra copying of lines in such numbers that he has been declared the inventor of the three-pointed pen; and then there was imprisonment in the dormitory, "the wooden breeches," as it was called in the college, and where he remained for weeks at a time. Whether he suffered from these

punishments and from the contempt of his teachers, Honoré at least never complained; for whatever left his mind free to follow its own self-cultivation was a welcome opportunity.

He had a tutor, the librarian of the rich Oratorian library, who during those rare recreation hours, when he had no extra lines to copy, was supposed to give him special lessons in mathematics. But by a tacit agreement the teacher paid no attention to the pupil, and the latter was permitted to read and carry away any books which took his fancy. In point of fact, no book seemed to him too austere or too repellent or too obscure for his youthful understanding. He absorbed pell-mell works upon religion, treatises of chemistry and physics, and historical and philosophical works. He even developed a special taste for dictionaries, dreaming over the exact sense of words, the adventures that befall them in the course of time and their final destinies.

"The absorption of ideas through reading had become in his case a curious phenomenon," so

Honoré de Balzac has recorded in *Louis Lambert,* in which he has painted in the person of his hero his own formative years in the college school of Vendôme. "His eye would take in seven or eight lines at once, and his mind would grasp the meaning with a velocity equal to that of his glance; sometimes even a single word in a phrase was enough to give him the essence of it. His memory was prodigious. He retained thoughts acquired through reading with the same fidelity as those suggested to him in the course of reflection or conversation. In short, he possessed every kind of memory: that of places, of names, of things, and of faces. Not only could he recall objects at will, but he could see them again within himself under the same conditions of position and light and colour as they had been at the moment when he first perceived them. This same power applied equally to the most intangible processes of the understanding. He could remember, according to his own expression, not merely the exact spot from which he had gleaned a thought in any given book, but also the conditions of his own

mind at far-off periods. By an undreamed-of privilege, his memory could thus retrace the progress and entire life history of his mind from the earliest acquired ideas down to the latest ones to unfold, from the most confused down to the most lucid. His brain, which while still young was habituated to the difficult mechanism of the concentration of human forces, drew from this rich storehouse a multitude of images admirable for their reality and freshness, and which supplied him with mental nutriment through all his periods of clear-sighted contemplation."

Such was the mental condition of Honoré at the time when he was regarded by his masters as a dullard, a mediocre pupil who might as well be left to reap the consequences of his own laziness. Clad in his grey uniform, ill shod and with hands red and swollen from chilblains, he held aloof from his comrades, indifferent alike to their games and their taunts. The ruddy colour of well-rounded cheeks, due to long walks in the open air of the country-side around Tours, had disappeared and his

face was now as white and delicate as a young girl's, while his eyes had become blacker and more mysterious than ever.

Honoré de Balzac received visits from his parents at Easter and at the time of the distribution of prizes. It was a joyous occasion, long awaited by the boy, who retained the warmest affection for his family. But his joy was short-lived. The pupil Balzac had won no prizes, he had received black marks, he had done no work; consequently, instead of the loving greeting that he expected, he was met only with words of disappointment and censure; he was told that he did not appreciate the sacrifices that were being made to educate him, he was idle and lazy; they hoped that next year he would do better and at last give them some little satisfaction.

Honoré listened to these reproofs with bowed head, and probably he made promises, in his desire to bring a smile to their faces and to receive some of those endearments that he had hungered for, through long days of solitude. But each year he again took up his in-

terrupted dream, more laboriously and more fiercely than before.

The college school at Vendôme possesses a literary society whose membership is confined to the Greats, and which gives performances of scenes from tragedies and comedies, poetic recitations, etc. Honoré conceived the ambition to have some writing of his own produced by this society. He practised rhyming, composed poems, and undertook an epic, one line of which has remained famous,

"O Inca! luckless and unhappy king,"

for it made him the butt and by-word of the entire school. He was nicknamed "The Poet," and laughed at for his formless efforts. The director of the school, M. Mareschal, told him a fable, with the charitable intent of turning him aside from his ambitions. There was once upon a time a young linnet in a soft and downy nest; but the young linnet longed for the free and open air and the blue sky. Its wings had not yet grown, and yet the imprudent bird made up its mind to fly. What happened?

Why, simply that the young linnet fell from the tree in which the nest was built, and hurt itself pitifully. Warning to poets who presume too far upon their powers. Honoré disregarded the fable, just as he had disregarded reproofs, mockery and punishment, and burrowed deeper than ever into the Oratorian library, in a sort of sombre phrensy. He neglected his studies and assigned tasks for the sake of the secret and forbidden work that constituted what he called later on, in *Louis Lambert,* his contraband studies. Although he continued to write poetry, his mind as it ripened and gathered strength in its singular solitude aspired to still loftier works, based upon metaphysics and pure reason.

While his comrades translated Virgil and Demosthenes, he had begun to write a *Treatise upon the Will,* a symbolic work which contained the germs of his entire destiny. His fellow students, rendered curious by his sustained application, continuing month after month, tried in vain to steal glimpses over his shoulder, but Honoré de Balzac would per-

mit no profane eye to fall upon his manuscript. He eluded their persistence and entrusted the precious pages to a box which he could secure under lock and key. A conspiracy was formed. They wanted to know what he had been writing all this time with such serious intent that nothing could take his attention from it. During a recreation period Honoré was copying, as usual, some extra lines as a punishment. A turbulent troupe invaded the classroom and flung themselves upon the box which concealed the manuscript. They wanted to know and they were going to know! Honoré defended the box energetically, for it was his heart and brain which they wanted to know, it was all his knowledge and beautiful dreams that they wished to lay bare to the light of day. There followed a veritable battle around that little wooden casket. Attracted by the outcries of the assailants, one of the masters, Father Haugoult, arrived in the midst of the tumult. Balzac's crime was proclaimed, he was hiding papers in his box and refused to show them. The master straightway ordered this bad pupil

to surrender these secret and forbidden writings. Honoré could not do otherwise than obey, for the box would be broken open if he did not unlock it of his own accord; so, with trembling hands, he despoiled himself of his treasures.

With careless fingers the master fumbled over the manuscript and with an air of disdain and a voice of severity summed up the case against this bad pupil:

"And it was for the sake of such nonsense that you have been neglecting your duties!"

Honoré held back his tears, profoundly hurt at this blow to his dreams and his creative pride; but he retained a confused sense of injustice and a conviction of the superior quality of his work.

He had now been at the Vendôme school for more than six years, and had given himself up to a prodigious amount of work, the extent of which no one even suspected. He had grown thin and pallid and half dazed, intoxicated with the ideas which whirled within his brain without system or order. He seemed to be attacked

by some grave malady, the cause of which could not be explained. The director of the school, M. Mareschal Duplessis, became anxious and wrote to the boy's parents to come and take him out of school. They came post-haste. Honoré was apparently in a somnambulistic state, hardly answering the questions put to him; his features were drawn and haggard, for he had been carrying too heavy a burden of readings, feelings and thoughts. His family could no more understand than his masters did the origin of his strange disorder. And Mme. Sallambier, who had come to live with her daughter at Tours, after the death of her husband in 1804, summed up the opinion of the family:

"That is the state in which the schools give us back the fine children that we send them!"

CHAPTER II

THE GARRET

HIS dazed condition, however, soon passed away after Honoré's removal from the Vendôme school. He was required to take long walks and play outdoor games, in consequence of which his cheeks filled out and regained their natural healthy colour. In appearance he was now a big lad, naïve and contented, who laughingly submitted to his sisters' teasing. But he had put his ideas in order: the new and troubled wine of books, to the intoxication of which he had succumbed, had clarified itself; his intellect was now exceptionally profound and mature. But his family was not willing to perceive this, and when by chance some remark of his revealed it his mother would answer:

"Honoré, you do not understand what you are saying!"

He did not try to dissuade her from this opinion, but consoled himself by turning to Laure and Laurence and confiding his plans to them:

"You shall see! I am going to be a great man!"

The girls laughed at this somewhat heavy-witted brother, who was so behind-hand in his studies that, although in the second form when he left Vendôme, he had to be put back into the third at Tours, in the institution conducted by a M. Chrétien. They greeted him with profound bows and mock reverence, and, while he responded with a good-natured smile, there was a certain pride mingled with it and an indefinable secret certainty as to the future.

In 1814 François Balzac was appointed Director of the Commissary Department of the First Military District, and the whole family removed to Paris, settling in the Marais quarter. Honoré continued his studies at two different schools successively, first at the Lepitre

school, in the Rue Saint-Louis, and then at the establishment of Sganzer and Bauzelin, in the Rue de Thorigny, where he continued to display the same mediocrity and the same indifference regarding the tasks required of him. Having finished the prescribed courses, he returned to his family, which at this time was living at No. 40, Rue du Temple, and his father decided that he should study law, supplementing the theoretical instruction of the law school with practical lessons from an attorney and notary. Honoré was enrolled in the law school November 4, 1816, and at the same time was intrusted to a certain M. de Merville, who undertook to teach him procedure. He spent eighteen months in these studies, and was then transferred to the office of M. Passez, where the same lapse of time initiated him into the secrets of a notary's duties. In the month of January, 1819, he passed his examinations in law.

During these three years the life of Honoré de Balzac had been extremely laborious. He faithfully attended the law school courses and

copied legal and notarial documents. Yet all this did not prevent him from satisfying his literary tastes by attending the lectures given at the Sorbonne by Villemain, Guizot and Cousin. Nor had he given up his ambition to write and to become a great man, as he had predicted to his sisters, Laure and Laurence. Mme. de Balzac, severe mother that she was, had regulated the employment of his time in such a way that he could never be at liberty. His bed-chamber adjoined his father's study, and he was required to go to bed at nine o'clock and rise at five, under such strict surveillance that he could later write, in *The Magic Skin*, "Up to the age of twenty-one I was bent beneath the yoke of a despotism as cold as that of a monastic order." In the evening, after dinner, he rendered an account of his day, and was then permitted to take a hand at Boston or whist, at the card-table of his grandmother, Mme. Sallambier. The latter, sympathising with her grandson, who was so strictly limited in money that he hardly had, from day to day, two crowns that he could call his own, allowed

herself to be beaten to the extent of moderate sums, which Honoré afterwards spent in the purchase of new books.

In spite of this strict family discipline, Honoré was at this time a congenial companion, full of high spirits and eager to please. He was delightfully ingenuous, and laughed heartily at jests at his own expense, frankly admitting his own blunders. But at times he would draw himself up in a haughty manner, half in fun and half in earnest: "Oh! I have not forgotten that I am destined to be a great man!"

Between the copying of two writs Honoré Balzac feverishly continued his literary efforts. He did not yet know how to make use of the material he had already amassed, ideas drawn from books and observations drawn from life; and he tried to measure his strength with that of the classic writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In overhauling Balzac's youthful papers, Champfleury has recovered the greater part of these essays. They show the greatest variety of interests. Here are five stanzas of wretched verse concerning the book

of *Job,* two stanzas on *Robert-le-Diable,* a projected poem entitled, *Saint Louis,* the rough drafts of several novels, *Sténie or Philosophic Errors, Falthurne:* the Manuscript of the Abbé Savonati, translated from the Italian by M. Matricante, Primary School Principal, *The Accursed Child, The Two Friends,* a satiric sketch, *The Day's Work of a Man of Letters, Some Fools,* and, furthermore, fragments of a work on idolatry, theism and natural religion, a historic monograph on the Vaudois, some outlined letters on Paris, literature, and the general police system of the realm of letters. In his youthful enthusiasms, Honoré de Balzac shifted from Beaumarchais to Molière, from Voltaire to Rousseau, from Racine to Corneille, and, contrary to his temperament, he drew up plans for violent and pathetic dramas, suited to the taste of the day.

After he had passed his examinations in law, and the question arose of a choice of career, his father announced to him the one which he had decided Honoré should adopt: he should be a notary. One of their friends was willing to

turn over his practice to him after a few years of apprenticeship. It was an honourable position, remunerative and much sought after. Honoré de Balzac had arrived at the turning-point of his existence. Here were two avenues before him, the first that of a notary, paved with gold, where he might reap honour, profit and esteem, a straight and easy route, restful and without unknown dangers; the second, lying outside of all the paths traced by society, and offering to those who entered upon it only a nebulous future, full of perils, uncertain combats, care, privation and want. It is a road which one must hew out for oneself, through the obscure forest of art and ideas, and many are the imprudent who have over-estimated their strength and perished there in the midst of indifference and contempt.

Everything urged Balzac towards a notary's career. The family fortune had diminished; the father had been placed upon the retired list, he had lost money in investments, it was absolutely necessary to cut down expenses, and Honoré, as the oldest son, was expected to

make a position for himself rapidly. Why did he hesitate to come to a decision and gratefully accept the proposition made by his father? The family brought pressure to bear, yet Honoré continued to say, "No, I will not be a notary." It was considered nothing less than scandalous. His mother reproached him for his ingratitude and warned him that he was driving her to despair. She was ashamed of a son who repaid the sacrifices they had made to educate him with such a want of proper feeling. Yet Honoré persisted in his attitude of revolt, Honoré, who throughout his childhood and youth had hitherto always submitted docilely to all the rules and commands of the family. "No, I will not be a notary,—I wish to become an author,—a celebrated author." They laughed at him. What promise of talent had he ever given to justify such absurd pretensions? Was it those wretched scribblings which had formerly caused so much merriment that now inspired him with such pride? Very well! he must simply get over it. His little absurdities were all very funny, when he was

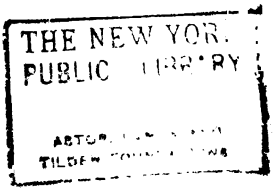
at the age of frivolity and nonsense, but now that he had come to years of discretion, it was time he learned that life was not play: "So, my boy, you will be a notary." "No," repeats Honoré, "I shall not." His black eyes flash, his thick lips tremble, and he pleads his cause before the family tribunal, the cause of his genius which no one else has recognised and which he himself perceives only confusedly within him.

"From childhood I looked upon myself as foreordained to be a great man," he wrote in *The Magic Skin,* "I struck my brow like André Chenier, 'There is something inside there!' I seemed to feel within me a thought to be expressed, a system to be established, a science to be expounded. I often thought of myself as a general, or an emperor. Sometimes I was Byron, and then again I was nothing. After having sported upon the pinnacle of human affairs, I discovered that all the mountains, all the real difficulties still remained to be surmounted. The measureless self-esteem which seethed within me, the sublime belief in des-



TWO PORTRAITS OF BALZAC

On the left: At the age of 32, from the Supplement in the newspaper *Le Voleur; On the right:* At about 34 years of age, from a sepia drawing by Louis Boulanger, the original of which is in the Museum at Tours.


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tiny, which perhaps evolves into genius if a man does not allow his soul to be torn to tatters by contact with business interests, as easily as a sheep leaves its wool on the thorns of the thicket through which it passes,—all this was my salvation. I wished only to work in silence, to crown myself with glory, the one mistress whom I hoped some day to attain."

What he actually said lacked the precision and the form of these phrases, but he was eloquent, and his father, who had no reason to suppose that he had an imbecile for a son, was the first to yield, in a measure, to his arguments. His mother still resisted, frightened at the risks he must run, far from convinced by his words, and without confidence in the future. Nevertheless, she was forced to yield. It was decided to try an experiment,—but it was to be kept a close secret, because their friends would never have finished laughing at such parental weakness. Two years were accorded to Honoré, within which to give some real proof of his talent. Hereupon he became joyously expansive, he was sure that he would

triumph, that he would bring back a masterpiece to submit to the judgment of his assembled family and friends. But, since a failure was possible and they wished to guard themselves from such a mortification, his acquaintances were to be told that Honoré was at Albi, visiting a cousin. Furthermore, in the hope of bringing him back to the straight path, through the pinch of poverty, his mother insisted that nothing more should be granted him than an annual allowance of fifteen hundred francs (less than $300), and that he should meet all his needs out of this sum. Honoré would have accepted a bare and penniless liberty with equal fervour and enthusiasm.

For the sake of economy, the Balzac family decided upon a provincial life, and removed to Villeparisis, in the department of Seine-et-Oise, where they secured a small yet comfortable bourgeois house. This was in the early months of 1819; Honoré, at the age of twenty-one, was left alone in Paris.

They had installed him in a garret, high up under a mansarde roof, in the Rue Lesdiguières,

No. 9, and it was he himself who chose this lodging because of the ease with which he could reach the Arsenal library during the daytime, while at night he would stay at home and work.

Ah, what a long, deep breath he drew, and how heartily he laughed his silent, inward laugh, as he stood with crossed arms and let his black eyes make inspection of his cramped and miserable dwelling. He was free, free! Here was his desk, covered with brown leather, his ink and pens, here were four chairs and a cupboard in which to hang his clothes and store away a few plates and his precious coffee-pot, there was his monastic bed, and beyond it some shelves nailed to the wall to hold his books. He sat down and dreamed, for he had just won his first victory, he was no longer accountable to anyone in the world for each and every hour of his life.

"I rejoiced," he has written in *The Magic Skin,* "at the thought that I was going to live upon bread and milk, like a hermit in the *Thébiade,* plunged in the world of books and

ideas, in an inaccessible sphere, in the midst of all the tumult of Paris, the sphere of work and of silence, in which, after the manner of a chrysalis, I was about to build myself a tomb, in order to emerge again brilliant and glorious." Next, he calculates what his expenses were during this studious retreat: "Three cents' worth of bread, two of milk, three of sausage prevented me from dying of hunger and kept my mind in a lucid condition. . . . My lodging cost me three cents a day, I burned three cents' worth of oil per night, I did my own housework, I wore flannel night-shirts, in order to cut down my laundry bill to two cents a day. I warmed my room with coal instead of wood, for I found that the cost divided by the number of days in the year never exceeded two cents. I had a supply of suits, underclothing and shoes sufficient to last a year, and I did not need to dress excepting to go to the libraries and do a few errands. The sum total of these expenses amounted to only eighteen cents, which left me two cents over for emergencies." Balzac somewhat exaggerates his

poverty and reduces his expenses to suit the pleasure of his poetic fantasy, but undoubtedly it was a brusque transition from the bourgeois comfort of family life to the austerity of his garret.

Nevertheless, he was exuberant and joyous,—as irresponsible as a young colt freshly turned out to pasture. His sister Laure, now living at Villeparisis with her parents, continued to receive his confidences. He wrote her the most minute details of his solitary existence,—jesting and burlesquing in a vein of frank and familiar humour.

"You ask, my dear sister, for details of my domestic arrangements and manner of living; well, here they are:

"I wrote directly to mamma, in regard to the cost of my purchases,—a little subterfuge to get an increased allowance,—but now you are going to tremble: it is much worse than a purchase,—I have acquired a servant!

"'A servant! What are you thinking of, my brother?'

"Yes, a servant. He has as odd a name as

the servant of Dr. Macquart (Balzac's physician); his is called *Tranquil;* mine is called *Myself.* A bad bargain, beyond question! Myself is lazy, awkward, and improvident. When his master is hungry or thirsty, he sometimes has neither bread nor water to offer him; he does not even know how to protect him from the wind which blows in through door and window, as Tulou blows upon his flute, but less agreeably.

"As soon as I am awake, I ring for Myself, and he makes up my bed. Then he starts in sweeping, but he is far from expert in that line of exercise.

" 'Myself!'

" 'What do you wish, sir?'

" 'Look at that spider's-web, where that big fly is buzzing loud enough to deafen me! Look at the sweepings scattered under the bed! Look at the dust on the window-panes, so thick that I can hardly see!'

" 'But, Monsieur, I do not see . . .'

" 'Come, hold your tongue! No answering back!'

"Accordingly, he holds his tongue.

"He brushes my coat and he sweeps my room while he sings, and he sings while he sweeps, laughs while he talks, and talks while he laughs. All things considered, he is a good lad. He has carefully put away my linen in the wardrobe beside the chimney, after first lining it with white paper; out of six cents' worth of blue paper, with the border thrown in, he has made me a screen. He has painted the room white, from the book-shelves to the chimney. When he ceases to be satisfied,—a thing which has not yet occurred,—I shall send him to Villeparisis, to get some fruit, or else to Albi, to see how my cousin is." (April 12, 1819.)

Honoré de Balzac was intoxicated with his liberty, and revelled in it to his heart's content. He could dream, idle, read or work, according to his mood. Ideas swarmed in his brain, and every day he drafted projects for tragedies, comedies, novels and operas. He did not know which of all these to work out to a finish, for every one of them seemed to him

capable of being developed into a masterpiece. He brooded over a possible novel which was to be called *Coquecigrue,* but he doubted whether he had the ability to carry it out according to his conception; so, after long hesitation, he decided in favour of a classic drama in verse, *Cromwell,* which he considered the finest subject in modern history. Honoré de Balzac rhymed ahead desperately, laboriously, for versification was not his strong point, and he had infinite trouble in expressing, with the required dignity, the lamentations of the Queen of England. His study of the great masters hampered him: "I devour our four tragic authors. Crébillon reassures me, Voltaire fills me with terror, Corneille transports me, and Racine makes me throw down my pen." Nevertheless, he refused to renounce his hopes. He had promised to produce a masterpiece, he was pledged to achieve a masterpiece, and the price of it was to be a blessed independence.

In the silence of his mansarde garret he worked, with his brow congested, his head enveloped in a Dantesque cap, his legs wrapped

in a venerable Touraine great-coat, his shoulders guaranteed against the cold, thanks to an old family shawl. He toiled over his alexandrian lines, he sent fragments of his tragedy to Laure, asking her for advice: "Don't flatter me, be severe." Yet he had high ambitions: "I want my tragedy to be the breviary of peoples and of kings!" he wrote. "I must make my début with a masterpiece, or wring my neck."

Meanwhile *Cromwell* did not wholly absorb him. Honoré de Balzac was already a fluent writer, full of clamorous ideas and schemes that each day were born anew. Between two speeches of his play, he would sketch a brief romance of the old-fashioned type, draft the rhymes of a comic opera, which he would later decide to give up, because of the difficulty of finding a composer, hampered as he was by his isolation. In addition to his literary occupations, he took an anxious interest in politics. "I am more than ever attached to my career," he wrote to his sister Laure, "for a host of reasons, of which I will give you only those that you would not

be likely to guess of your own accord. Our revolutions are very far from being ended; considering the way that things are going, I foresee many a coming storm. Good or bad, the representative system demands immense talent; big writers will necessarily be sought after in political crises, for do they not supplement their other knowledge with the spirit of observation and a profound understanding of the human heart?

"If I should become a shining light (which, of course, is precisely the thing that we do not yet know), I may some day achieve something besides a literary reputation, and add to the title of 'great writer' that of great citizen. That is an ambition which is also tempting! Nothing, nothing but love and glory can ever fill the vast recesses of my heart, within which you are cherished as you deserve to be."

In order to enlighten himself in regard to the legislative elections, he appealed to one of his correspondents, M. Dablin, a rich hardware merchant and friend of the family, who had often come to the aid of his slender purse. He

asked him for a list of the deputies, and inquired what their political opinions were and how the parties would be divided in the new Chamber, and when he did not receive as prompt an answer as he had expected, he repeated his questions with a certain show of impatience. At this period of isolation, M. Dablin was also his factotum and his mentor. Balzac commissioned him to buy a Bible, carefully specifying that the text must be in French as well as Latin; he wished to read the *Sicilian Vespers;* he felt it his duty, as a simple soldier in the ranks of literature, to attend a performance of *Cinna,* by the great General Corneille, from the safe seclusion of a screened box, and he would be glad to see Girodet's *Endymion* at the Exposition, "some morning when there is no one else there," in order not to betray his incognito!

How happy he was during those hours of liberty that were never to return and which he was destined to remember with unparalleled emotion, in his subsequent inferno of ceaseless toil! He was utterly irresponsible, he made an

orgy out of a melon or a jar of preserves sent him from Villeparisis, and he decorated his garret with flowers, which were the gift of Laure, his beloved confidante. He had his dreams and his hours of exaltation, when he listened to the mingled sounds of Paris, which rose faintly to his dormer window during the beautiful golden evenings of springtime, evenings that seemed to young and ambitious hearts so heavy-laden with ardent melancholy and hope; and he would cry aloud: "I realised to-day that wealth does not make happiness, and that the time that I am spending here will be a source of sweet memories! To live according to my fantasy, to work according to my taste and convenience, to do nothing at all if I so choose, to build beautiful air-castles for the future, to think of you and know that you are happy, to have Rousseau's Julie for my mistress, La Fontaine and Molière for my friends, Racine for my master and the cemetery of Père-Lachaise for my promenade! . . . Oh! if all this could last forever!"

And his twenty years, burning with the fever

of vast desires, betray themselves in a single exclamation: "To be celebrated and to be loved!"

But there were times when he left his garret at nightfall, mingled with the crowd and there exercised those marvellous faculties of his which verged upon prodigy. He has described them in a short tale, *Facino Cano,* and they appear to have been an exceptional gift. "I lived frugally," he writes; "I had accepted all the conditions of monastic life, so essential to those who toil. Even when the weather was fine, I rarely allowed myself a short walk along the Boulevard Bourdon. One passion alone drew me away from my studious habits; yet was not this itself a form of study? I used to go to observe the manners and customs of suburban Paris, its inhabitants and their characteristics. Being as ill-clad and as careless of appearances as the labourers themselves, I was not mistrusted by them, I was able to mingle with groups of them, to watch them concluding their bargains and quarrelling together at the hour when they quit their work. In my case, observation had al-

ready become intuitive, it penetrated the soul without neglecting the body, or rather it grasped so well the exterior details that it straightway passed above and beyond them; it gave me the faculty of living the life of the individual on whom it was exerted, by permitting me to substitute myself for him, just as the dervish in the *Thousand and One Nights* took the body and soul of those persons over whom he pronounced certain words.

"To throw off my own habits, to become some one else than myself, through an intoxication of the moral faculties, and to play this game at will, such was my way of amusing myself. To what do I owe this gift? Is it a form of second sight? Is it one of those qualities, the abuse of which might lead to madness? I have never sought the sources of this power; I possess it and make use of it, that is all."

Some evenings he would not go out, because ideas were surging in his brain; but if the rebellious rhymes refused to come he would descend to the second floor and play some harm-

less games with certain "persons," or it might be a hand at boston, for small stakes, at which he sometimes won as much as three francs. His resounding laughter could be heard, echoing down the staircase as he remounted to his garret, exulting over his extensive winnings. Nothing, however, could turn him aside from his project of writing *Cromwell,* and he set himself a date on which he should present his tragedy to the members of his family gathered together for the purpose of hearing him read it. After idling away long days at the Jardin des Plantes or in Père-Lachaise, he shut himself in, and wrote with that feverish zeal which later on he himself christened "Balzacian"; revising, erasing, condensing, expanding, alternating between despair and enthusiasm, believing himself a genius, and yet within the same hour, in the face of a phrase that refused to come right, lamenting that he was utterly destitute of talent; yet throughout this ardent and painful effort of creation, over which he groaned, his strength of purpose never abandoned him, and in spite of everything he inflexibly pursued his ungov-

erned course towards the goal which he had set himself. At last he triumphed, the tragedy was finished, and, his heart swelling with hope, Honoré de Balzac presented to his family the *Cromwell* on which he relied to assure his liberty.

The members of the family were gathered together in the parlour at Villeparisis, for the purpose of judging the masterpiece and deciding whether the rebel who had refused to be a notary had not squandered the time accorded him in which to give proof of his future prospects as an author. The father and mother were there, both anxious, the one slightly sceptical, yet hoping that his son would reveal himself as a man of talent; the other as mistrustful as ever, but at the same time much distressed to see her son so thin and sallow, for during those fifteen months of exile he had lost his high colour and his eyes were feverish and his lips trembling, in spite of his fine air of assurance. Laurence was there, young, lively and self-willed; and Laure also, sharing the secret of the tragedy and sighing and trembling on behalf of

Honoré, her favourite brother. It was a difficult audience to conquer, for they had also invited for that evening such friends as knew of the test imposed upon the oldest son; and these same friends, while perhaps regarding it as a piece of parental weakness, nevertheless now played the rôle of judges.

"At the end of April, 1820," relates Mme. Surville, "he arrived at my father's home with his finished tragedy. He was much elated, for he counted upon scoring a triumph. Accordingly, he desired that a few friends should be present at the reading. And he did not forget the one who had so strangely underestimated him.*

"The friends arrived, and the solemn test began. But the reader's enthusiasm rapidly died out as he discovered how little impression he was making and noted the coldness or the consternation on the faces before him. I was one of those who shared in the consternation. What

* A friend, who judged him solely on the strength of his excellent handwriting, declared, when the question arose of choosing a position for him, that he would never make anything better than a good shipping clerk.

I suffered during that reading was a foretaste of the terrors I was destined to experience at the opening performances of *Vautrin* and *Quinola.*

"With *Cromwell* he had not yet avenged himself upon M. ——— (the friend of whom mention has just been made); for, blunt as ever, the latter pronounced his opinion of the tragedy in the most uncompromising terms. Honoré protested, and declined to accept his judgment; but his other auditors, though in milder terms, all agreed that the work was extremely faulty.

"My father voiced the consensus of opinion when he proposed that they should have *Cromwell* read by some competent and impartial authority. M. Surville,* engineer of the Ourcq Canal, who was later to become Honoré's brother-in-law, suggested a former professor of his at the Polytechnic School.

"My father accepted this dean of literature as decisive judge.

"After a conscientious reading, the good old

* Mlle. Laure de Balzac was married in May, 1820, one month after the reading of *Cromwell,* to M. Midy de Greneraye Surville, engineer of Bridges and Highways.

man declared that the author of *Cromwell* had better follow *any other career in the world than that of literature.*"

Such was the judgment passed upon this masterpiece which had been intended to be "the breviary of peoples and of kings!" Yet these successive condemnations in no way shook Balzac's confidence in his own genius. He wished to be a great man, and in spite of all predictions to the contrary he was going to be a great man. No doubt he re-read his tragedy in cold blood and laughed at it, realising all its emphatic and bombastic mediocrity. But it was a dead issue, and now with a new tensity of purpose he looked forward to the works which he previsioned in the nebulous and ardent future; no setback could turn him aside from the path which he had traced for himself.

CHAPTER III

HIS APPRENTICESHIP

THE precious hours of liberty, in the mansarde garret, had taken flight. After fifteen months of independence, study and work, Honoré returned to the family circle, summoned home by his mother. She desired, no doubt, to care for him and restore his former robust health which had been undermined by a starvation diet, but she also wished to keep him under strict surveillance, since privation had failed to bend his will and the disaster of his tragedy had not turned him aside from his purpose. Honoré, unconquered by defeat, had asked that they should assure him an annual allowance of fifteen hundred francs, in order that he might redeem his failure at an early date. This request was refused, and nothing was guaranteed him beyond food and lodging,

absolutely nothing, unless he submitted to their wishes.

What years of struggle those were! Honoré de Balzac refused to despair of his destiny, and he valiantly entered upon the hardest of all his battles, without support and without encouragement, in the midst of hostile surroundings. He used to go from Villeparisis to Paris, seeking literary gatherings, knocking at the doors of publishers, exhausting himself in the search for some opening. And how could he work under the paternal roof? Nowhere in the house could he find the necessary quiet, and he was practically looked upon as an incapable, an outcast who would be a disgrace to his family. He himself felt the precariousness of his present situation, and in consequence became taciturn, since he could not communicate to the others his own unwavering faith in his future, and he was forced to admit that, at the age of twenty-two, he had not yet given them any earnest of future success.

In order to demonstrate that it is not impossible to live by literature, and more especially for

the sake of establishing his material independence, he was ready to accept any sort of a task whatever. And all the more so, since his mother had not given up hope of making him accept one of those fine careers in which an industrious young fellow may win esteem and fortune. The "spectre of the daily grind" stared him in the face, and although he had escaped a notary's career, through the death of the man to whose practice he was to have succeeded, they gave him to understand that the sombre portals of a government position might open to him.

"Count me among the dead," he wrote to his sister Laure, who, since her marriage, had resided at Bayeux, "if they clap that extinguisher over me. I should turn into a trick horse, who does his thirty or forty rounds per hour, and eats, drinks and sleeps at the appointed moment. And they call that living!—that mechanical rotation, that perpetual recurrence of the same thing!"

In spite of a few short trips, and occasional brief sojourns in Paris, in the one foothold which his father had retained there, he was con-

strained by necessity to remain beneath the family roof-tree. They gave him his food and his clothing, but no money. He suffered from this, and groaned and grumbled as if he were in a state of slavery. Nevertheless, his unquenchable good humour and his determination to make his name famous and to acquire a fortune saved him from the impotence of melancholy. He drew spirited sketches of the family and sent them to Laure, to prove to her that he was resigned.

He admired his father's impassiveness in the midst of all the confusion of the household, like an Egyptian pyramid, indifferent to the hurricane. The fine old man who expected to live upwards of a hundred years and share with the State, as last survivor, the profits of a Lafarge tontine policy in which he held a share, a sum amounting to millions, studied the writings of the Chinese because they were famous for their longevity. He had lost nothing of his serenity nor of his caustic wit, and Honoré confessed that he himself had very nearly choked, laughing at some of his jests. Nevertheless he was

not a father in whom one could confide, and the son, isolated and forced to conceal his feelings, found relief only in his brief periods of work in Paris, and in observing the habits and manners of the family circle. He witnessed the preparations for the marriage of his sister, Laurence, to M. de Montzaigle, visiting inspector of the city imposts of Paris, and he drew this picturesque portrait of his future brother-in-law: "He is somewhat taller than Surville; his features are quite ordinary, neither homely nor handsome; his mouth is widowed of the upper teeth, and there is no reason for assuming that it will contract a second marriage, since mother nature forbids it; this widowhood ages him considerably, but on the whole he is not so bad—as husbands go. He writes poetry, he is a marvellous shot; if he fires twenty times, he brings down not less than twenty-six victims! He has been in only two tournaments, and has taken the prize both times; he is equally strong in billiards; he rhymes, he hunts, he shoots, he drives, he . . . , he . . . , he . . . And you feel that all these accomplishments, carried to the high-

est degree in one and the same man, have given him great presumption; that is the trouble with him up to a certain point, and that certain point, I am very much afraid, is the highest degree in the thermometer of self-conceit."

Honoré admitted, however, that his sister Laurence would be happy in her marriage and that M. de Montzaigle was a thorough gentleman; but it was not after this fashion that he himself understood marriage and love: "Presents, gifts, futile objects, and two, three or four months of courtship do not constitute happiness," he wrote; "that is a flower which grows apart and is very difficult to find."

Meanwhile Honoré de Balzac, tired of the discomfort of trying to work at Villeparisis, between his ever-distrustful mother and his indulgent but sceptical father, hired a room in Paris, no one knows by what means. There he shut himself in, and there he composed the novels of his youthful period, having for the time being put aside his dreams of glory. To earn money and to be free, that was his immediate necessity. Later on, when he had an assured

living, he would be able to undertake those great works, the vague germs of which he even then carried within him.

His repeated efforts at last bore fruit; he found collaborators, namely, Poitevin de Saint-Alme, who signed himself "Villarglé," Amédée de Bast, and Horace Raisson, and then a publisher, Hubert, who undertook to bring out his first novel. It was issued in 1822, in four volumes, under the somewhat cumbrous title of *The Heiress of Birague, a Story based upon the Manuscripts of Don Rage, Ex-Prior of the Benedictines, and published by his two Nephews, A. de Villarglé and Lord R'Hoone.* This work brought him in eight hundred francs in the form of long-period promissory notes, which he was obliged to discount at a usurious rate, besides sharing the profits with his collaborator. Nevertheless the fact that he had earned money renewed his faith in his approaching deliverance, and he uttered a prolonged and joyous shout. He informed Laure of his success, and suggested that she should recommend his novel as a masterpiece to the ladies

of Bayeux, promising that he would send her a sample copy on condition that she should not lend it to any one for fear that it might injure his publisher by decreasing the sales. Straightway he began to build an edifice of figures, calculating what his literary labours would bring him in year by year, and feeling that he already had a fortune in his grasp. This was the starting point of those fantastic computations which he successively drew up for every book he wrote, computations that always played him false, but that he continued to make unweariedly to the day of his death.

From this time on, Honoré de Balzac devoted himself for a time, with a sort of feverish zeal, to the trade of novel-maker for the circulating libraries. He realised all the baseness of it, but, he argued, would he not be indebted to it for the preservation of his talent? *The Heiress of Birague* was followed by *Jean-Louis, or the Foundling Girl,* published by Hubert in four volumes, for which he received thirteen hundred francs. His price was going up, and his productive energy increased in proportion. Still

working for Hubert, he followed *Jean-Louis* with *Clotilde de Lusignan, or the Handsome Jew,* "a manuscript found in the archives of Provence and published by Lord R'Hoone," in four volumes. It brought him in two thousand, a princely sum!

Henceforward, nothing could stop him on his road to success, and he had no doubt that he would soon earn the twenty thousand francs which were destined to form the basis of his fortune. He changed publishers and, in 1822, he brought out through Pollet, within the space of a few months, *The Centenarian or the Two Beringhelds,* by Horace de Saint-Aubin, in eight volumes, and *The Vicar of the Ardennes,* which appeared over the same pseudonym, and for which he had requested the collaboration of his sister and his brother-in-law, Surville.

This was a year of unbridled production. Honoré lived in a state of exaltation; one of his letters to Laure was signed, "writer for the public and French poet at two francs a page." He had almost realised his dream of liberty. But when this fever of writing chapter after chapter,

novel after novel, had cooled off, he realised what wretched stuff they were, and he regretted the precious hours of his youth that they were costing him, because of his impatience to prove his talent by results. He admitted this to his sister, frankly and with dignity, in the full confidence of his inborn gift.

"At all events, I am beginning to feel and estimate my strength. To know what I am worth, and yet sacrifice the first flower of my ideas on such stupidities! It is heart-breaking! Oh, if I only had the cash, I would find my niche fast enough and I would write books that might last a while!

"My ideas are changing so fast that before long my whole method will change! In a short time the difference between the *me* of today and the *me* of tomorrow will be the difference between a youth of twenty and a man of thirty. I think and think, and my ideas are ripening; I realise that nature has treated me kindly in giving me the heart and brain that I have. Believe in me, dear sister, for I have need of some one who believes, though I have not given up

the hope of being somebody one of these days. I realise now that *Cromwell* did not even have the merit of being an embryo; and as to my novels, they are not worth a damn; and, what is more, they are no incentive to do better."

This letter was dated from Villeparisis, on a certain Tuesday evening, in the year 1822; Honoré de Balzac was twenty-three years old; he read his destiny clearly, but he was fated to achieve it only after surmounting the hardest obstacles, by "the sweat of toil," to borrow his own vigorous phrase. While waiting for that desired epoch, when he would be able to be himself and nothing else, he was forced to continue to turn the millstone that ground out the worthless grain. In 1823, his productive power seems to have fallen off, either because he had exhausted the patience of his publishers, or for some other reason. During that year he published nothing excepting *The Last Fairy or the New Wonderful Lamp,* brought out by Barba.

After the hopes begotten in 1822 and his amazing effort of rapid production, Balzac once

more encountered his old difficulty of placing his stories, and for nearly three years he waged a fruitless fight. In order to disarm his mother and give proof of his good will, he gave lessons to his brother Henri and to young de Berny, the son of a neighbouring family in Villeparisis; he exhausted himself in efforts that for the most part were in vain. Nothing, however, broke down his courage. He succeeded in 1824 in publishing through Buissot *Annette and the Criminal,* in four volumes, which was a continuation of *The Vicar of the Ardennes,* and was confiscated by the police, and then through Delongchamps an *Impartial History of the Jesuits.* Finally, Urbain Canel bought his *Wann-Chlore* in 1825, and that was the last of the novels of his youth.

It is interesting to ask, how much headway Honoré de Balzac had made since the days of his vast enthusiasm over *Cromwell,* in his garret in the Rue Lesdiguières. Had he drawn any nearer to fame, that "pretty woman whom he did not know," and whose kisses he so eagerly desired during his long nights of labour and of

dreams? He has descended into the literary arena with valiant heart, as a soldier willing to serve in the ranks, yet cherishing the legitimate hope of earning promotion. He had not shrunk from the humblest tasks, and yet, after three years of struggle, he found himself back at the starting point. His novels had brought him neither fame nor fortune, and he had not even acquired the leisure that was necessary to him before he could achieve those works which seethed and teemed within his brain, filling it with the nebulous and confused elements of an unborn world. What was he to do?

Honoré de Balzac refused to admit defeat, and, with a promptness of decision which belongs rather to men of action than to the contemplative type, he turned his attention to business and commercial enterprises. He had none of the prejudices of men of letters, who refuse to recognise that there are any employments worthy of their faculties outside of literature. Little he cared as to the means, provided he could lay the foundation of his fortunes, and assure his independence. Novels had not brought

him material emancipation. Very well then! he would abandon them without regret. Nevertheless, he would preserve the memory of them, and recognise that they had been useful as a literary exercise. In fact, he said to Champfleury, in 1848, "I wrote seven novels, simply as a training. One to break myself in to dialogue; one to learn how to write description; one to learn how to group my characters; one as a study in composition, etc." Although Balzac never publicly acknowledged these works of his youth, they had their share in his intellectual development; and, because of this claim, they should not be wholly set aside from the rest of his gigantic work. In any case, they are by no means destitute of merit.

Relinquishing his career as man of letters, from which he could not make a living, Honoré de Balzac flung himself into business with the same activity that he had applied to the production of novels. As early as 1822, he had entertained various business schemes, and he would have accepted the appointment of deputy supervisor of the construction work on the Saint-

Martin canal, under his brother-in-law, Surville, if he had been able to give the required security. But he had at his command only five hundred francs, which was an inadequate sum. The attraction of business, which was one of the characteristics of his temperament, enticed him into the most chimerical adventures, although the first business connection which he formed, and which was in the nature of publishing and bookselling, resulted in giving him the financial start which he so ardently desired.

CHAPTER IV

IN BUSINESS

HAVING started in to be a "literary man-of-all-work," to borrow the phrase of Hippolyte Auger, his collaborator on the *Feuilleton des Journaux Politiques,* who was closely in touch with him in those early days, Honoré de Balzac had formed relations with the second-rate papers, the publishers of novels, the promoters of all sorts of works that might lend themselves to speculating purposes in the publishing line. It was undoubtedly due to the chance demands of literary work that he found himself flung headlong into business. He had reached the point where he was ready to accept any proposition of a promising nature, in his eagerness to become free, to escape the strict surveillance of his family and the reproaches of his mother, and furthermore he was urged into this path by a certain Mme. de Berny, a woman

who loved him and who wished to see him become a great man, for she alone recognised his genius.

How and when had they become acquainted? Perhaps at Paris, since the de Bernys dwelt at No. 3 Rue Portefoin, and the Balzacs at No. 17, perhaps later on at Villeparisis, as a result of neighbourly relations between the two families. However this may be, Mme. de Berny exerted a profound and decisive influence upon Honoré de Balzac; she was his first love and, it should be added, the only real one, if we may judge by the length of time that he cherished an unchanging memory of her.

Laure Antoinette Hinner was born at Versailles on May 24th, 1777; she was the daughter of a German harpist who had been summoned from Wetzlar to the Court of France, and her mother was Louise Guelpée de Laborde, lady-in-waiting to Marie-Antoinette. She had no less personages than the king and queen for her god-father and god-mother, and she grew up within sound of the festivities of the Trianon, in an atmosphere of frivolity and exag-

gerated refinements. Her mother, left a widow when the child was barely ten years old, took a second husband, François Régnier de Jarjayes, a fervent royalist, involved in all the plots which had for their object the deliverance of the royal family. After the brilliant days of court life, she lived through the tragic hours of the Revolution, in the midst of conspirators, and in an atmosphere of restlessness and anxiety. In 1793, Laure Hinner, at the age of fifteen years and ten months, was married at Livry to Gabriel de Berny, who was himself only twenty. The union seems to have resulted unhappily, in spite of the fact that it was blessed with nine children; the sensibility of the wife and her warm-hearted tenderness accorded ill with the cold and reserved character of the husband.

When Balzac entered into his close friendship with Mme. de Berny, the latter was forty-five years of age and a grandmother. In spite of her years and her many children, she was still beautiful, on the order of tender and mature beauty. Balzac borrowed certain traits from

her for the noblest heroines in his works; and she served successively as model for Mme. Firmiani, for Mme. de Mortsauf in *The Lily in the Valley,* and for Pauline in *Louis Lambert;* and he spoke constantly of her in his correspondence with Mme. de Hanska, yet always with a sort of reverence and passionate gratitude.

She was a woman of almost clairvoyant intelligence, instinctive and unerring, and was endowed with rich qualities of heart and brain, which she had never had a chance to use. She treasured letters and souvenirs, and she held in reserve a store of tenderness of a rather maternal sort. Balzac, isolated in the midst of his own family, thrust back upon himself and suffering from the need of expansion, surrendered himself utterly to this new friend, with the impetuosity born of happiness and freedom. She was his confidential adviser, his comforter and his friend. She listened to his dreams, she shared the elation of his ambitions, she espoused his projects and fostered his genius; and when he was too cruelly wounded in the

struggle, she consoled him with words of soothing tenderness.

It caused Mme. de Berny actual suffering to see her young friend toiling for sheer mercenary ends, and squandering the precious years of his youth in writing novels that were frankly hack-work; and it hurt her also to see the condition of financial servitude in which his family kept him. While the father, François de Balzac, watched his son's efforts with indulgent irony, for he held that novels were to the Europeans what opium is to the Chinese, and while the mother, irritated at the rebellion of her first-born, maintained her attitude of hostile distrust, Mme. de Berny alone had confidence in his future, notwithstanding that appearances were all against him.

Mme. de Berny and Honoré de Balzac undoubtedly put their heads together, to seek for some means of bettering a situation so painful and humiliating for a young man of twenty-five. Accordingly, when chance seemed to offer them a good opportunity, they hastened to take advantage of it.

The publisher, Urbain Canel, had conceived the idea of bringing out the French classics in single compact octavo volumes, to be issued in installments. He was to begin this collection with a *Lafontaine,* for which he had ordered a preface from Balzac, who had previously done work for him. We may well believe that he at the same time enlarged upon his projects and that he aroused Balzac's interest by dwelling upon the magnitude, the novelty and the large remuneration of his enterprise. It was a question of nothing more nor less than the production of an entire library. Balzac's imagination awoke to the possibilities of this scheme which seemed to him a colossal one, capable of laying the foundations of numerous fortunes. He calculated what he might make out of it personally, and decided that at last destiny had deigned to smile upon him. Canel was far richer in hopes for the success of his project than in money to carry it out, and he was ready to accept all offers of co-operation, if not actually to solicit them. When Mme. de Berny was informed of the scheme by Balzac, she did not

try to dissuade him from joining in it, but, on the contrary, devoted and trusting friend that she was, offered to aid him by placing a considerable sum of money at his disposal.

In April, 1825, a partnership for the purpose of publishing French classics, and more especially a *Lafontaine* in one octavo volume, to be issued in installments, was formed between Messrs. Urbain Canel, publisher, Charles Carron, physician, Honoré de Balzac, man of letters, and Benet de Montcarville, retired officer. It was not long before the partners quarrelled, and M. Hanotaux has published a letter * written by M. Carron, in which the latter complains of Balzac's arrogant tone, while at the same time apologising to him for having called him a liar. At all events, when a second partnership was formed later in that same month of April, with a view to the publishing of a *Molière,* to form part of the same collection as the *Lafontaine,* the only members left were Canel and Balzac, who agreed each to put up

* *La Jeunesse de Balzac: Balzac Imprimeur,* 1825-1828 (The Youth of Balzac: Balzac as Printer), by G. Hanotaux and G. Vicaire, Paris, 1903.

half the capital and divide the profits and losses equally.

Balzac had taken his rôle quite seriously, and the first partnership was barely formed when he set off for Alençon, in order to make arrangements with a certain engraver, Godart *fils*, who had been chosen to reproduce the drawings by Deveria, with which the collection was to be illustrated. He was the most active of all the partners; nevertheless, as business ventures, the *Lafontaine* and the *Molière* were very far from profitable. The volumes were to be issued in four parts at five francs each, making the cost of the complete work in each case twenty francs. But when the installments of the *Lafontaine* were issued, during the months of April and May, in an edition of three thousand copies, they met with no success. Urbain Canel declared that he could go no further with the venture, the partners withdrew, and Balzac was left alone to bear the whole burden of the enterprise. His share of the capital had been furnished him by a certain M. d'Assouvillez, and, in order to buy out

Canel's interest, Mme. de Berny endorsed notes to the amount of nine thousand, two hundred and five francs, between May 15, 1825, and August 31, 1826. Altogether, the net result of the transaction was a loss to Balzac of fifteen thousand francs. Being unable to continue by himself the publication of these two works, he sold the *Lafontaine* to Baudouin, who paid for it by transferring to Balzac a number of uncollectable claims. One of these, amounting to 28,840 francs, was a debt owed by a bookseller in Reims, named Fremeau, who had failed and who cleared off this obligation by turning over to Balzac an entire shopful of battered old volumes, out of date and worthless.

Did this first disastrous experience turn him aside from further business ventures? Not at all. Balzac was by nature dogged and persevering. Hope illuminated his calculations; he found the best of reasons to explain the failure of an edition of classic authors; but he conjured up still better ones for assailing new enterprises. The edition of the classics had not been a success,—well, no matter! He would

establish himself as a printer. In the course of his peregrinations among the printing-houses he had made the acquaintance of a young foreman named Barbier, in whose welfare he had become interested and whose special ability he had recognised. He decided to take him into partnership.

Balzac's father, when asked to help his son to establish himself in business, gave a guarantee of thirty thousand francs, which represented the invested capital, that had yielded the interest of fifteen hundred francs, the sum allowed him at an earlier period. Mme. de Berny interested herself in the proposed venture, and so did M. d'Assouvillez, the former silent partner. Balzac acquired the establishment of Laurens Sr., Printer, No. 17, Rue des Marais-Saint-Germain, now Rue Visconti, at the cost of thirty thousand francs, plus twelve thousand francs as an indemnity to Barbier, because he was resigning from an assured position, and fifteen thousand francs for equipments. On the 12th of April, 1826, he sent in an application to the Minister of the Interior, and, thanks

to two letters of recommendation from M. de Berny, counsellor to the Royal Court of Paris, be obtained his license on January 1st, as successor to Jean-Joseph Laurens, retired.

What was Balzac's life during the two years that he practised the profession of printer? In his contract of partnership with Barbier he had reserved for himself the offices of bookkeeper and cashier, signing papers and soliciting orders, while his associate was to attend to the technical end of the enterprise. In order to feed his presses with work, Balzac counted upon his energy, his will power, his spirit of initiative and his tact; he mentally recapitulated the number of publishers with whom he had had relations, and who beyond a doubt would entrust their work to him. The printing house was located on the ground floor of a distinctly gloomy building in the Rue des Marais, a street so narrow that two carriages found it difficult to pass each other.

When he had finished his round of calls upon clients, he watched the busy labour of his workmen in the fetid atmosphere of the composing

room, and he swelled with joy as though he himself were the motor power of the various parts of a living organism. Nothing discouraged him, neither physical fatigue nor the mental strain of carrying on so huge an enterprise. Then, when it seemed as though he was on the point of bending beneath the burden, a secret consolation caused him once again to square his shoulders. On the floor above the printing house he had fitted up a little apartment quite luxuriously, and there each day he received Mme. de Berny, who came to bring him the comfort of brave and tender words, which seemed to him to open the golden gates of the future. For Mme. de Berny these were the hours in which she could lay bare her ardent and sensitive soul, while for Balzac they were a whole education in sentiment and social graces at the hands of a woman rich in sensibility and in memories. At this period she exerted a most effective influence over the ideas of her young friend; she pictured to him the conditions of fashionable life prior to the Revolution, with its great ladies, its court intrigues, and its

mysteries of passion and ambition; and she imbued him with monarchical principles. But, above all else, it was she herself who was the life-giving flame which fired his genius. All of Balzac's life seems to have been impregnated with these first lessons received from her, and he could never recall without emotion the aid that he received from Mme. de Berny during those early years of hard struggles. In 1837 he wrote as follows to Mme. Hanska:

"I should be very unjust if I did not say that from 1823 to 1833 an angel sustained me through that hideous battle. Mme. de B...., although married, has been like an angel to me. She has been mother, sweetheart, family, friend and counsellor; she has formed the writer, she has consoled the man, she has created my taste; she has wept and laughed with me like a sister, she has come day after day and every day to lull my sorrows, like a beneficent sleep. She has done even more, because, although her finances are in control of her husband, she has found means to lend me no less than forty-five thousand francs, and I paid back the last six

thousand francs in 1836, including five per cent. interest, of course. But it was only gradually that she came to speak of my debt. Without her I should certainly have died. She often became aware that I had had nothing to eat for several days; and she provided for all my needs with angelic goodness. She encouraged me in that pride which preserves a man from all baseness, and which today my enemies reproach me for, as being a foolish self-satisfaction, and which Boulanger has perhaps somewhat exaggerated in his portrait of me." *

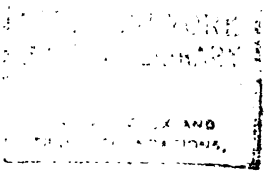
The illusions which Balzac had cherished of the rapid success of his printing house vanished very soon, and from the outset he found himself facing the realities of a difficult situation. In spite of all his efforts, clients remained rare, and there was no sort of order either in the business organisation or in the financial management. M. Gabriel Vicaire has made an investigation to determine how many works issued from Balzac's presses, and he has been

*The original of this portrait of Honoré de Balzac is at the château of Wierzchownia; there is a copy of it in the Palace at Versailles.



THE DE BALZAC FAMILY

Above: François de Balzac; Mme. F. de Balzac, *née* Sallambier, father and mother of the great novelist. *Below:* Honoré de Balzac, at the age of 25, an engraving by A. Lepère, from a painting attributed to Achille Deveria.—Laure de Balzac, his sister, afterwards Mme. Surville.



unable to count more than one hundred and fifty, or thereabouts, which was a small number, during a space of two years, for an important and well-equipped printing house. The first order that he filled was a druggist's prospectus, *Anti-mucous Pills of Longevity, or Seeds of Life,* for Cure, a Parisian druggist, of No. 77, Rue Saint-Antoine; it was a four-leaf 8vo pamphlet, dated July 29, 1826. The average orders seem to have been commonplace enough; nevertheless, Balzac did print a number of interesting books for various publishers; among others, *The Historical and Literary Miscellanies of M. Villemain,* for Ladvocat, and *La Jacquerie, Feudal Scenes,* followed by the *Carvajal Family,* a drama by the "author of the dramatic works of Clara Gazul" (Mérimée), for Brissot-Thivars. He was also the printer for two periodicals, the *Gymnase,* for Carnot and Hippolyte Auger, the editors of that review of social tendencies, and the *Annales Romantiques,* for Urbain Canel. The latter was the publisher of the younger literary school, and brought out in his magazine the

works of Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, Benjamin Constant, Chateaubriand, Delavigne, etc. Are we to suppose that business cares had turned Balzac aside from all his literary projects? And what must his feelings have been when he read on pages still smelling of fresh ink names already familiar, and some of them long since famous, while he himself was still only a simple printer? There is reason for thinking that his business venture, with all its cares and anxieties, never interrupted the silent but fabulous labour that was shaping itself inside his brain, and that when he saw new authors becoming famous he merely said, "My day will come." Meanwhile, he yielded to an influence absolutely opposed to his natural bent, and contributed to the *Annales* two poems perfectly romantic in tone: an *Ode to a Young Girl* and *Verses Written in an Album.*

But in reality Balzac never had the gift of versification, even in his youth; and later on, when he had need of poems for his *Human Comedy,* he applied to his friends, Théophile Gautier, Mme. de Girardin, or Lassailly, mere-

ly indicating the general tone of the verses he wanted them to write.

In addition to the above-mentioned periodicals, Honoré de Balzac printed the *Album of History and Anecdote,* from January to April, 1827, and he seems also to have been its editor. For, as a matter of fact, subscriptions to it were received at the printing house, No. 17, Rue des Marais-Saint-Germain, and there are anecdotes to be found in it which he afterwards repeated in some of his works.

In spite of all his hopes and efforts, the business went from bad to worse, and Balzac endured all the agonies of a merchant who sees the dawn of the day when a note falls due and knows that his cash drawer is empty. We can picture him, anxiously studying his account books, with his elbows on his desk, and imagining a thousand ingenious means of meeting his financial troubles. But the hard reality shattered them, one by one, like thin glass. He was a prey to the money-lenders and the lawyers, who had no mercy upon a poor wretch who had failed to "make good," and accom-

plished his ruin with mathematical indifference. The sheriffs, the attorneys, the usurers, the intrusive hordes of clerks and process-servers swooped down upon the printing house and the printer, eager to share the spoils. Honoré de Balzac, alone in this "horrible struggle," stood at bay against the pack, using all the stratagems that he had learned in long years of conflict to throw them off the track and save his last remaining resources. He put forth all his accumulated cleverness, his fertile spirit of invention, yet he finally had to yield to superior numbers, and witness the rapid and steady disintegration of a business on which he had staked so many hopes.

But a new opportunity presented itself; his imagination caught fire, and he foresaw a fortune, an assured fortune which nothing could take from him,—and once again he laughed his deep, sonorous, powerful laugh, defying destiny. In September, 1827, a type foundry was offered for sale, after having failed, and Balzac, in conjunction with Barbier and the assignee Laurent, bought it for the sum of thirty-

six thousand francs. Mme. de Berny, with her inalienable devotion, joined with him in the new venture, contributing nine thousand francs as her share. The business of the foundry had hitherto been limited to the production of fonts of type, but it was the ambition of the partners to extend its scope to engraving on steel, copper and wood, and to a special method of stereotyping invented by Pierre Duronchail, to which they had acquired the rights. A catalogue reproducing the various forms of type which the foundry could furnish, as well as vignettes, head and tail pieces and typographical ornaments, was widely circulated, yet the world at large failed to perceive the advantages offered by the rejuvenated and improved house of Gillé *Fils*. After a three months' trial, Barbier withdrew from the partnership formed for the exploitation of the foundry, and on April 3, 1828, a new association was formed between Laurent and Balzac, in which Mme. de Berny's name also figured, but only as a silent partner. But every effort was in vain, nothing could avert disaster. On the 16th of April,

1828, the partnership of Laurent and Balzac was dissolved, the former remaining as assignee.

Balzac was dismayed. The menace of insolvency closed the horizon of all his hopes. He had wished to triumph without the aid of his family, to demonstrate that he could carry on a business and achieve a fortune. Yet now he was obliged to call his family to his assistance, to cry out for succour. The situation was desperate, and it was necessary to act quickly, wisely and energetically, for the family honour was at stake. Mme. de Balzac, who until now had shown herself a suspicious and dissatisfied mother, sacrificed herself in the presence of imminent disaster; she offered up all her private fortune to satisfy the creditors. At her request, one of her cousins, M. Sedillot, undertook the settlement of the unfortunate business difficulties of her son, Honoré; and, being a prudent and experienced business man, he was able to limit the extent of the disaster. Barbier bought back the printing house for sixty-seven thousand francs, and Mme. de Berny put her son, Alexandre, in charge of the foun-

dry, in place of Balzac. The liabilities amounted to 113,081 francs, of which 37,600 had been advanced by Mme. de Balzac, while the only assets were the 67,000 francs resulting from the sale of the printing house. Among the debts recorded in the settlement there are some which prove that at this time Balzac had already acquired a taste for luxury; he owed Thouvenin, book-binder to the Duc d'Orléans, 175 francs for binding a *Lafontaine,* a *Boileau,* and a *Thousand and One Nights,* while the long unsettled bill of his shoemaker amounted to no less than three hundred francs!

The intervention of his mother and the sacrifices that she consented to make saved him from inevitable failure, but he had to endure an avalanche of reproaches. At the age of twenty-nine he withdrew from business, with debts amounting to ninety thousand francs, and how could he, rebellious son that he was, ever hope to clear himself, when he might by this time have been a prosperous notary, well on the road towards honours, if he had only listened to the wise counsel of his parents?

His father, François Balzac, had learned of the disaster, in spite of all the precautions taken to keep him in ignorance, and he addressed a letter, very noble in tone, to M. Sedillot, thanking him for having saved the family name from dishonour. We get an echo of the recriminations which must have arisen within the family circle from the firm yet bitter reply that Balzac made to his sister Laure:

"Your letter has given me two detestable days and two detestable nights. I brooded over my justification, point by point, like Mirabeau's *Mémoire* to his father, and I was already fired with zeal for the task; but I have decided not to write it. I cannot spare the time, my dear sister, and besides I do not feel that I have been at all in the wrong." And in the same letter he said further, with calm pride: "I must live, my dear sister, without asking anything of anybody; I must live in order to work and pay back every one to whom I am in debt."

Yes, he was nearly twenty-nine years old, his debts amounted to ninety thousand francs,

and he was alone and without resources,—but although it was a heavy burden he did not consider that it was too heavy for his shoulders. He had debts, but he meant to pay them, by means of his pen and his genius; and so we shall see him undertaking the most formidable task that ever human brain produced,—and that was destined to cease only at his death.

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST SUCCESS

MISFORTUNE, far from discouraging Balzac, strengthened all his powers of resistance and exalted his will and his energy. He had a healthy and strongly optimistic nature, upon which chagrins, reverses and sorrows acted like so many stimulants; he was never so resolute as after a defeat. M. Sedillot had barely begun the liquidation of his business affairs, the printing house and foundry, when he gave himself up passionately and exclusively to his literary work, apparently having forgotten all his troubles, save the necessity of paying his debts. He had a habit of prompt decisions and quick action. Eager to break at once all the remaining fetters that bound him to his assignee, he wrote to the General Baron de Pommereul, at Fougères:

"For the past month I have been busy over

some historical researches of great interest, and I hope that in the absence of talent, which in my case is altogether problematic, our national manners and customs may perhaps bring me good luck. I have realised that, no matter how industrious I am, my efforts will not bring me in anything like a living wage before the first of next January; and meanwhile the purest chance has brought to my attention a historic incident of 1798 relating to the war of the Chouans and Vendéans, which gives me a subject that is very easy to handle. It requires no research, except in regard to the localities.

"My first thought was of you, and I decided to ask you to grant me an asylum for a matter of twenty days. My muse, her trumpet, a quire of paper and myself will surely not be greatly in your way." *

The general's father had been a friend of François Balzac, who had rendered him some financial service; accordingly the son hastened to reply to Honoré that his house was open to

* *Balzac in Brittany*, published letter by R. du Pontavice de Heussy.

him. No sooner was the letter received than the latter set forth, such was his haste to leave Paris, collect the material for his story, and find the necessary tranquillity for writing it. He left Paris without change of linen and with his toilet all in disorder, intoxicated with his sense of liberty, "to such an extent," writes M. de Pontavice, "that he presented himself to his provincial friends wearing such a piteous hat that they found it necessary to conduct him forthwith to the only hatter in Fougères. That honourable tradesman went to infinite pains before he succeeded in discovering any headwear large enough to shelter the bony casket which contained the *Human Comedy*."

Honoré de Balzac was exuberant with joy. He took his hosts by storm through his wit and good humour. He questioned M. de Pommereul as to the main facts about the Chouans; he jotted down in his notebook, which he afterwards came to call his *larder*, a host of original anecdotes preserved by oral tradition; and he roamed the whole countryside, fixing in his mind the landscapes and the gestures, at-

titudes and physiognomies of the peasants, and saturating himself with the atmosphere of the region in which he was to place the chief scenes of his drama.

Those were happy hours during which Honoré de Balzac withdrew to his first-floor room, seated himself before a little table placed close to the window, and wrote with feverish elation of the heroic acts of the Blues and the Chouans, of Commander Hulot, Marche-à-Terre and the Abbé Gudin, and wove the tangled threads of the adventures of Fouché's spy, Mlle. de Verneuil, who set forth to save the young stripling and allowed herself to be caught in the divine snare of love.

On some evenings he remained in the drawing-room in company with his hosts, and entered into controversies with Mme. de Pommereul, who, being very pious herself, tried to persuade him to make a practice of religion; while Balzac, in return, when the discussion was exhausted, endeavoured to teach her the rules of backgammon. But the one remained unconverted and the other never mastered the

course of the noble game. Occasionally he helped to pass the time by inventing stories, which he told with all the vividness of which he was master.

The days slipped away, as fruitful as they were happy; but Balzac's family became troubled over his prolonged absence. They feared that he was wasting his time amid the pleasures of the country, after all the sacrifices they had made for him, and when he ought to be hard at work, clearing off his debts. They summoned him home, and he left Fougères at the end of October, regretting the interruption to his task. But he had no sooner arrived in Paris than he set to work again, and he did not fail to keep his provincial friends informed of the progress of his novel. The first thing he did was to change its title from *The Stripling,* to which Mme. de Pommereul had objected, to *The Chouans or Brittany Thirty Years Ago,* and finally settled definitely on *The Last Chouan or Brittany in 1800.* This work, the first that he signed with his own name, was finished in the beginning of 1829,

and was published by Urbain Canel. On the eleventh of March he announced to the Baron de Pommereul that he was sending him a set.

"Between four and six days from now," he wrote, "you will receive the four 12mo volumes of *The Last Chouan or Brittany in 1800.*

"Did I call it my work? . . . It is partly yours also, for as a matter of fact it is built up from the precious anecdotes which you so ably and so generously related to me between glasses of that pleasant and mild *vin de Grave* and those crisp buttered biscuits."

The Last Chouan proved a success. It was criticised and its merit was admitted. *L'Universel* shows the tone of most of the articles devoted to it: "After all, the work is not without interest; if reduced to half its length, it would be amusing from one end to the other. In general, the style is pretentious in almost all of the descriptive parts, but the dialogue is not lacking in naturalness and frankness."

In 1829, after the publication of *The Last Chouan,* Honoré de Balzac plunged boldly, under his own name, into the turmoil of liter-

ature. He pushed ahead audaciously, elbowing his way, and he made himself enemies. He went his own road, indifferent to sarcasms, mockeries, and spiteful comments called forth by his tranquil assurance and certainty of his own strength, which he did not try to hide. At a period when it was the fashion to sigh and be pale and melancholy, in a stage-setting of lakes, clouds and cathedrals, and when one was expected to be abnormal and mediæval, Balzac displayed a robust joviality, he was proud of his stalwart build and ruddy complexion, and, far from looking to the past for literary material, his observing and clairvoyant eyes eagerly seized the men of his own time and transformed them into heroes.

All day long he went the rounds of publishers and editors, of papers and reviews, and sought connections with other writers of repute. Returning in the evening to his study, he would write throughout the entire night, until long after the dawn had come, with feverish regularity and energy and without fatigue, ready to begin again the next day. When he gave

up his printing house he went to live at No. 1, Rue Cassini, in a quarter which at that time was almost deserted, between the Observatory and the Maternity Hospital. He brought his furniture with him and fitted up his rooms in accordance with his own tastes and resources. This had called forth some bitter comments from his parents: What right had he to comfort and to something approaching luxury before he had cleared off his debts? "I am reproached for the furnishings of my rooms," he wrote to his sister Laure, "but all the furniture belonged to me before the catastrophe came! I have not bought a single new piece! The wall covering of blue percale which has caused such an outcry was in my chamber at the printing house. Letouche and I tacked it with our own hands over a frightful wall-paper, which would otherwise have had to be changed. My books are my tools and I cannot sell them. My sense of good taste, which enables me to make all my surroundings harmonious, is something which cannot be bought (unfortunately for the rich); yet, after all, I care so little for

any of these things that, if one of my creditors wants to have me secretly imprisoned at Sainte-Pélagie, I shall be far happier there; for my living will cost me nothing and I shall be no closer prisoner than my work now keeps me in my own home."

In spite of this apparent and wholly circumstantial disinterestedness, Balzac loved artistic surroundings, rugs, tapestries and silver ware. He detested mediocrity, and could enjoy nothing short either of glorious poverty, nobly endured in a garret, or wealth and the splendour of a palace. Balzac shared his apartment with Auguste Borget, a painter and traveller, who was one of his most faithful friends. From a window in their parlour they could look across some gardens and see the dome of the Invalides. Ever since his childhood Balzac had made a sort of worship of Napoleon. He was his model, and his great ambition was to equal Napoleon's exploits in the realm of the intellect. Mme. Ancelot relates in *The Salons of Paris* that Balzac had erected a sort of altar, surmounted by Napoleon's bust, on which he had inscribed:

"What he began with the sword I shall achieve with the pen." This anecdote is confirmed by Philarète Chasle, who saw the statue in the Rue Cassini apartment, a plaster statue representing the emperor clad in his redingote and holding his celebrated lorgnette in his hand.

Napoleon's influence upon Balzac was profound, or rather there was a sort of parallelism between their two ambitions, each of a different order, but equally formidable. Balzac was essentially a conqueror and legislator. But he wished to establish his empire in the intellectual domain, for he believed that the time for territorial conquest was past; yet he wished to prescribe laws for the people and govern them himself. He was a born ruler, whether he turned to literature or politics, and he appointed himself "Marshal of Letters," just as he might have aspired to be prime minister to the king.

After the publication of *The Last Chouan,* Balzac's literary activity became prodigious. Shutting himself into his workroom and seated before a little table covered with green cloth,

under the light of a four-branched candlestick, dressed in his monkish frock, a white robe in which he felt at ease, with the cord tied slackly around his waist and his shirt unbuttoned at the collar, he turned out, in a dizzy orgy of production, *The Physiology of Marriage,* the short stories constituting the *Scenes of Private Life, At the Sign of the Cat-and-Racket, The Ball at Sceaux, The Vendetta, A Double Family, Peace in the Household, Gobseck* and *Sarrasine,* besides studies, criticisms and essays for newspapers and magazines.

The *Physiology of Marriage* appeared at the end of December, 1829, and caused quite a little scandal. The public did not understand Balzac's ideas, they recoiled from the boldness of his themes, which sounded like sheer cynicism, and remembered only the crudity of certain anecdotes, without trying to penetrate their philosophy. He was attacked in the public press, and even his friends did not spare him their reproaches. Balzac defended himself against the criticisms of Mme. Zulma Carraud, whom he had met at Versailles at the home of

his sister Laure, and whose esteem and affection he was anxious to keep. Mme. Carraud was a broad-minded and discerning woman, of delicate sensibility and an upright nature. Her husband was Commander Carraud, director of studies at the Military School of Saint-Cyr, and later inspector of the powder works at Angoulême. Balzac loved her as a confidential friend,—who, at the same time, did not spare him the truth,—and he made frequent visits to the towns where she lived, especially to Issoudun, at her château of Frapésle, after the Commander had gone into retirement.

The *Physiology* might seem to have been an abnormal work for a man of Balzac's years if it was not known that he had two collaborators, Mme. de Berny, who brought him her experience as a woman of the world, and his father, who gave him the greater part of his maxims.

François Balzac believed that he was ordained to live for more than a hundred years, and perhaps he would have attained that age if he had not succumbed to the after-effects of

an operation on the liver, June 19, 1829. Honoré felt this loss keenly, for, although his father often showed himself sceptical as to the value of his son's literary efforts, too little attention has been paid to the share that he had in the origin of that son's ideas.

The *Physiology* had only just appeared when Balzac published the *Scenes of Private Life,* on March 10, 1836; and, without slackening speed, he contributed to a number of different journals. Émile de Girardin had welcomed him to the columns of *La Mode,* which he had founded in 1829, under the patronage of the Duchesse de Berry, and he contributed sketches to it regularly: *El Verdugo, The Usurer,* a *Study of a Woman* (signed "By the author of the *Physiology of Marriage*"), *Farewell, The Latest Fashion in Words, A New Theory of Breakfasting, The Crossing of the Beresina,* and *Château Life,* an essay against the publication of which Balzac protested because his sensitive literary conscience was unwilling that it should be printed until developed into something more than a crude sketch,—and lastly

came the *Treatise on Fashionable Life,* a manual which, under the form of pleasantry, was saturated with philosophy and lofty social doctrines.

At the same period, from 1829 to 1830, he collaborated with Victor Ratier on the *Silhouette,* under his own name and various pseudonyms. For this periodical he wrote phantasies of a festive tone and somewhat broad humour: *Some Artists* (signed, "An Old Artist"), *The Studio, The Grocer, The Charlatan, Aquatic Customs, Physiology of the Toilet, The Cravat considered by itself and in its Relations to Society and the Individual, Physiology of the Toilet and Padded Coats, Gastronomic Physiology,* etc. In *Le Voleur,* edited by Maurice Alhoy, he published *La Grisette Parvenue, A Working Girl's Sunday,* and *Letters on Paris,* a series of articles, incisive and farsighted, dealing with French politics. Finally, still in 1830, he was almost one of the accredited editors of *La Caricature,* for which he wrote fantasies against the government, sketches of Parisian manners, and pictures of

the life of the capital, some of which were destined later to find their way into *The Magic Skin;* namely, *Le Cornac de Carlsruhe, Concerning Indifference in Politics, A Minister's Council, The Veneerer, A Passion in College, Physiology of the Passions,* etc.

But, not satisfied with this fecundity,—which would have exhausted many another man of letters,—Honoré de Balzac, in 1830, founded a critical organ, in company with Émile de Girardin, H. Auger, and Victor Varaigne, under the title of *Feuilleton des Journaux Politiques.*

And there were thousands of pages which Balzac carelessly let fall from his fertile pen, and which he valued so slightly that he never afterwards gathered them together for his collected works. On the other hand, they did not seem to interfere with the composition of his more important writings, and at the very time that he seemed to be scattering his efforts in twenty different papers he was writing *The Woman of Thirty,* under the guidance of Mme. de Berny, and working on his extraor-

dinary *Magic Skin,* a dramatic study with a colouring of social philosophy, which he was greatly distressed to hear defined as a novel. He was possessed with a sort of fever of creation, he had already visualised nearly all the characters in his *Human Comedy,* and, in spite of his driving labours and his marvellous facility at writing, he could not keep pace with his own imagination. Meanwhile, in order to keep himself awake and excite his productive forces, he indulged, at this period, in a veritable orgy of coffee, cup after cup, an orgy which was destined, after twenty years' continuance, to have a disastrous effect upon his health.

Balzac took the most minute precautions in making this coffee; he not only selected several kinds from different localities, in order to obtain a special aroma, but he had his own special method of brewing it, which developed all the virtues of the blend. In his *Treatise on Modern Stimulants* he has told us how he prepared the coffee and what its effects were upon his temperament. "At last I have discovered a horrible and cruel method," he

writes, "which I recommend only to men of excessive vigour, with coarse black hair, a skin of mingled ochre and vermilion, squarish hands, and legs like the balustrades in the Place Louis XV. It consists in the employment of a decoction of ground coffee taken cold and anhydride (a chemical term which signifies 'little or no water') and on an empty stomach. This coffee falls into your stomach, which, as you have learned from Brillat-Savarin, is a sack with a velvety interior, lined with little pores and papillæ; it finds nothing else, so it attacks this delicate and voluptuous lining; it becomes a sort of food which demands its digestive juices; so it wrings them forth, it demands them as a pythoness calls upon her god, it maltreats those delicate walls as a truckman maltreats a pair of young horses; the plexus nerves inflame, they burn and send their flashes to the brain. Thereupon everything leaps into action; thoughts and ideas rush pell-mell over one another, like battalions of the grand army on the field of battle, and the battle takes place. Recollections arrive in a headlong charge, with

banners flying; the light cavalry of comparisons advances in a magnificent gallop; the artillery of logic hurries up with its gun-carriages and ammunition; flashes of wit arrive like so many sharp-shooters; the action develops; the paper slowly covers over with ink, for the night's work has begun, and it will end in torrents of black water, like the battle in torrents of black powder."

In spite of the alarming benefits which Balzac attributes to this régime, one is amazed at the abundance of his productions, for, even though he sacrificed a large part of his days and nights, he none the less frequented certain famous salons, was often absent on vacations at M. de Margonne's home at Saché; at La Grenadière, where he rented a house; and at Nemours. Besides, he had to spare some time to his friends, his publishers, and to the adjustment of his already complicated finances.

With his remarkably keen sense of realities, he knew that it did not suffice merely to produce a work in order to have it become known and sell; and, while it was repugnant to him to

solicit an article from a fellow craftsman, he excelled in the art of exciting curiosity, and acquiring partisans and women admirers who, upon the publication of each new volume, would loudly proclaim it as a masterpiece. He was on intimate terms with the Duchesse d'Abrantès and Mme. Sophie Gay; he was received by the Baron Gérard and by Mme. Ancelot; he announced to his publisher, Charles Gosselin, that Mme. Récamier had asked him to give a reading from his *Magic Skin,* "so that we are going to have a whole lot of people to boom us in the Faubourg Saint-Germain." And he did not content himself with all these benevolent "boomers," for, according to Philibert Audebrand, he himself wrote a very flattering article on his own work in *La Caricature,* over one of his three pseudonyms.

The book-collector Jacob sketched a verbal portrait of Balzac in 1831, a little heavy and over-emphasised, yet fairly like him: "He was about thirty-two years old, and seemed younger than his age. He had not yet taken on too

much flesh, yet he was far from being slender, as he still was five or six years earlier. He did not yet wear his hair long, nor had he a moustache. His open countenance revealed a character ordinarily kindly and jovial; his high colour, red lips and brilliant eyes were often likely to give the impression that he had just come from the dinner table, where he had not wasted his time." In order to give a greater degree of truth and life to this sketch, it should be added that Balzac had extremely mobile features, that he was very sensitive, and that, if anything was said that gave him offence, his expression became indifferent, non-committal or haughty. He suffered when he was congratulated on his short stories and tales, for with justifiable pride he wished to be appreciated as a poet, a philosopher and a thinker. It has not been sufficiently recognised how well he understood the essence of his own genius; for, aside from the short recitals in the *Scenes of Private Life,* his early works are philosophic works, *The Magic Skin, Louis Lambert,* and *The Country Doctor,* ranging all the way from

the most lofty speculations regarding human intelligence to the details of the social, material and moral organisation of a village.

But, on the other hand, although Balzac had already acquired a massive aspect, he did not have that vulgar outline which Jacob, the book-fancier, suggests. And when he was speaking enthusiastically in a drawing-room his face irradiated, one might almost say, a sort of spirituality, his eyes glowed with a splendid fire, and his lips parted in a laugh of such potent joyousness that he communicated the contagion of it to his hearers. He spoke in a pleasant, well-modulated voice, with fluctuations in tone that accorded nicely with the circumstances of the recital; and his gestures and power of mimicry seemed to conjure up the characters whose adventures he narrated. He was so successful that he gave up telling stories in public, for fear of acquiring the reputation of an *entertainer,* which might have robbed him of the high consideration which he exacted both for himself and for his writings.

In the full heat of his literary work Balzac

did not forget his political ambitions; and, since the Revolution of July, 1830, had made him eligible, he was anxious to present himself in 1832 at one of the electoral colleges, as a candidate for the supplementary elections. In April he wrote a pamphlet, *Inquest into the politics of two Ministries,* which he signed, "M. de Balzac, eligible elector," and in which he set forth his criticisms of the government and his own principles. As soon as it was printed he sent off forty copies to Général de Pommereul, for the purpose of distribution among his friends in Fougères; and he wrote him:

"I shall write successively four or five more, in order to prove to the electors who nominate me that I can do them honour, and that I shall try to be useful to the country.

"As for parliamentary incorruptibility, my ambition is to see my principles triumphantly carried out by an administration, and great ambitions are never for sale." Whether Baron de Pommereul forewarned him of failure at the

hands of his fellow citizens, or whether Balzac wished to have two strings to his bow instead of one, no one knows, but at all events in June he asked Henry Berthoud, director of the *Gazette de Cambrai*, to back him as candidate in his district. In return, Balzac promised to try to get some articles by Berthoud accepted by Rabon for the *Revue de Paris*. "The coming Assembly," he prophesied, "is likely to be a stormy one; it is ripe for a revolution. It is possible that the people of your district would prefer to see a Parisian representing their interests rather than any of their own men; a town always loves to see itself represented by an orator; and, if I seek election to the Assembly, it is with the idea of playing a leading part in politics and of giving the benefit to the community which supported me and from which I have received the political baptism of election. All my friends in Paris, either rightly or wrongly, base some hope upon me. I shall have as my credentials: Yourself, if that is agreeable to you; the *Revue de Paris*, the

Temps, the *Débats,* the *Voleur,* one other minor journal, and my own actions from now on."

But, in spite of all his projects, Balzac was destined never to be a candidate from any district,—and so much the better for the advancement of French thought.

CHAPTER VI

DANDYISM

AFTER the publication of the *Physiology* and *The Magic Skin,* which followed *The Chouans* and *Scenes from Private Life,* Balzac found himself enrolled among the fashionable novelists. The public did not understand his ideas, they were incapable of grasping the grandeur of the vast edifice which he already dreamed of raising to his own glory, but they enjoyed his penetrating analysis of the human heart, his understanding of women, and his picturesque, alluring and dramatic power of narrative. He excited the curiosity of his women readers, who recognised themselves in his heroines as in so many faithful mirrors; and the consequence was that he was besieged by a host of feminine letters. Balzac had a perfumed casket in which he put away the confidences, avowals and advances of

his fair admirers, but he did not reply to them.

In September, 1831, however, an unsigned letter arrived at the château at Saché, where he had been spending his vacation; but, as he had already left, it was forwarded to him in Paris. It was distinguished by its refinement of tone, its cleverness and its frank and discerning criticisms of the *Physiology* and *The Magic Skin*,—so much so, indeed, that Balzac decided to answer its attacks upon him by defending his works and explaining his ideas. There followed a second letter and then others, and before long a correspondence had been established between Balzac and the unknown lady, so fascinating on her side of it that Balzac was eager to know her name, and demanded it, under penalty of breaking off the whole correspondence. She willingly revealed her identity, she was the Duchesse de Castries. She informed him further that it would give her pleasure to have him call upon her, in the Rue de Varennes, on the day when she received her intimate friends. Balzac, no doubt, gave utterance to his great, joyous, triumphant

laugh, in which there was also mingled a touch of pride.

Mme. de Castries was one of the most highly courted ladies in the exclusive circle of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, an aristocrat of aristocrats; she was still young,—her age was thirty-five,—and beautiful, with pale and delicate features, crowned with masses of hair of a dazzling Venetian blonde. She was a descendant of the De Maille family, her husband had been a peer of France under Charles X, and through marriage the Duc de Fitz-James, one of the leaders of the legitimist party, was her brother-in-law, thus connecting her with the highest nobility of France. To Balzac she represented the doorway to a world of which he had had only vague glimpses as reflected in the reminiscences of Mme. de Berny,—and she smiled upon him with a mysterious smile of welcome.

The novelist hastened to accept the Duchess's invitation, and became one of the regular frequenters of her salon. She led him on; and he talked of his ideas, his projects and his dreams.

He also talked discreetly of his heart, and, without encouraging him, she allowed him to understand that she listened to him without displeasure. His relations with Mme. de Berny had been tinged with a sort of bitterness, due to the disparity in their ages, and his happiness had never been complete. These relations were now about to come to a close, yet even after the rupture they were destined to remain like a single soul, united by a profound and lasting affection, beyond the reach of any severance. Be that as it may, Balzac at this period was audaciously planning another conquest, and a dazzling one, more brilliant than his most ambitious hopes could have wished. So the pretty game continued, half in sport and half in earnest.

Whether it was due solely to the influence of the duchess or whether a certain amount of calculation entered in, since literary success is judged by the money profits and the expenditures and fashionable appearance of the writer, or whether he also obeyed his own fondness for a broad and sumptuous scale of living,

no one knows; probably something of all three entered in; but the fact remains that after he knew Mme. de Castries Balzac became transformed into a dandy, a man of fashion. He was a lion in that circle of gilded youth which frequented the *Opéra* and the *Bouffes*, that shone in famous salons, that diverted itself in cabarets, and distinguished itself by wealth, gallantry and impertinence.

Balzac now had money. He possessed an unusual faculty for disposing of his copy advantageously. To begin with, he was paid by the magazines to which he gave the first serial rights, the *Revue de Paris* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes;* and, secondly, in disposing of the book rights he never gave his publishers more than the right to bring out one edition and for a limited time; and the result was that frequent new editions, either of single works or groups of works, taken together with his new works, formed altogether a considerable production of volumes. Furthermore, he received advances from publishers and editors, he trafficked in endorsed notes, he borrowed

and lived on credit. This was in a measure the prosperity that he had so greatly coveted, yet he gained it at the cost of countless toil, activity and worriment.

Balzac now acquired carriages and horses, he had a cabriolet and a tilbury painted maroon; his coachman was enormous and was named Leclercq, while the groom was a dwarf whom he called Anchises. He engaged servants, a cook and a valet named Paradis. He patronised the most fashionable tailor of the time, and dressed in accordance with the decrees of the latest style. Mme. Ancelot states that he ordered no less than thirty-one waistcoats, and that he had not given up the hope of some day having three hundred and sixty-five, one for each day in the year. He abandoned wool in favour of silk. Rings adorned his fingers; his linen was of the finest quality; and he used perfumes, of which he was passionately fond.

In the morning he went to the *Bois*, where the other young men of fashion congregated; he sauntered up and down and later paid visits;

in the evening, when he had no invitations to social functions, he dined at the Rocher de Cancale or at Bignon's, or showed himself at the *Opéra* in the box occupied by an ultra-fashionable set known as the "Tigers." After the performance he hurried off to cut a brilliant figure at the salon of the beautiful Delphine Gay, the wife of Émile de Girardin, in company with Lautour-Mézeray, the "man with the camelia," Alphone Karr, Eugène Sue, Dumas, and sometimes Victor Hugo and Lamartine. In that celebrated apartment, hung in sea-green damask, which formed such a perfect background for Delphine's blonde beauty, Balzac would arrive exuberant, resplendent with health and happiness, and there he would remain for hours, overflowing with wit and brilliance.

In the midst of this worldly life he by no means neglected Mme. de Castries, but, on the contrary, was assiduous in his attentions to the fair duchess. At her home he met the Duc de Fitz-James and the other leaders of militant legitimism, and little by little he gravitated

towards their party. He wrote *The Life of a Woman* for *Le Rénovateur,* and also an essay in two parts on *The Situation of the Royalist Party;* but it was not long before he quarrelled with Laurentie, the editor in chief, who probably wounded his pride as a man of letters.

The society which he frequented must have reacted on Balzac, for it was at this time that he conceived the desire of proving himself a gentleman by descent, the issue of a time-honoured stock, the d'Antragues family. He adopted their coat-of-arms and had his monogram surmounted by a coronet. Later on he abandoned these pretensions, and his forceful and proud reply is well known when some one had proved to him that he had no connection with any branch of that house:

"Very well, so much the worse for them!"

But meanwhile, how about his work? It is not known by what prodigy Balzac kept at his task, in spite of this busy life of fashion and frivolity. He published *The Purse, Mme. Firmiani, A Study of a Woman, The Message, La Grenadière, The Forsaken Woman, Colonel*

Chabert (which appeared in *L'Artiste* under the title of *Transaction*), *The Vicar of Tours*, and he composed that mystical work which cost him so much pains that he almost succumbed to it, the *Biographical Notice of Louis Lambert*. At the same time he corrected, improved and partly rewrote *The Chouans* and the newly published *Magic Skin*, with a view to new editions, in accordance with the criticisms of his sister Laure and Mme. de Berny.

Nevertheless, money continued to evaporate under his prodigal fingers; he had counted upon revenues which failed to materialise, he could no longer borrow, for his credit was exhausted, and he found himself reduced to a keener poverty than that of his mansarde garret. After all this accumulation of work, all this expenditure of genius, to think that he did not yet have an assured living! He had frightful attacks of depression, but they had no sooner passed than his will power was as strong as ever, his fever for work redoubled, and his visionary gaze discerned the fair horizons of hope as vividly as though they were already within reach of his

hand. Then he would shut himself into his room, breaking off all ties with the social world, or else would flee into the provinces, far from the dizzy whirl of Paris.

Thus it happened that he made several sojourns at Saché in 1831, and that he set out for it once again in 1832, determined upon a lengthy absence. Mme. de Castries had left Paris and had asked him to join her at the waters of Aix in September; but, before he could permit himself to take this trip, he must needs have the sort of asylum for work that awaited him in Touraine.

M. de Margonne, his host, welcomed him like a son each time that he arrived. He had entire liberty to live at the château precisely as he chose. He was not required to be present at meals, nor to conform to any of the social conventions which might have interfered with the most profitable employment of his time. If, in the absorption of working out the scheme of the task which he had in progress, he was sometimes irritable and sullen, no one took offence at his attitude. When he had not yet

reached the stage of the actual writing, and was merely composing his drama within his powerful imagination, he arose early in the morning and set off upon long walks across country, sometimes solitary and silent, sometimes getting into conversation with the people he met and asking them all sorts of questions. He had no other source of amusement, for he did not care for hunting, and, as to fishing, he made no success of it, for he forgot to pull in the fish after they had taken the hook!

"The only games that interested him were those that demanded brain-work," writes a relative of M. de Margonne, M. Salmon de Maison-Rouge, in a vivid account of Balzac's visits to Saché. "My father, who prided himself upon playing a very good game of checkers, on one occasion tried a game with him. After several moves my father said, "Why, Monsieur de Balzac, we are not playing Give-away! You are letting me take all your men; you are not playing the game seriously." "Indeed, I am," rejoined Balzac, "as seriously as possible," and he continued to let his men be

taken. At last he had only one man left, but he had so managed the moves that, without my father being aware of it, this last man was in a position to take all the men my father had left in one single swoop,—and there were a good many, for M. de Balzac had taken only six up to that move. From that time onward my father regarded him as one of the keenest minds that had ever lived." *

But Balzac was not staying at Saché for the purpose of playing checkers, and in the same notice M. Salmon tells of his habits of work, on the strength of an account given by M. de Margonne:

"He had a big alarm-clock," he writes, "for he slept very well and very soundly, and he set the alarm for two o'clock in the morning. Then he prepared himself some coffee over a spirit lamp, together with several slices of toasted bread; and then started in to write in bed, making use of a desk so constructed that he could freely draw up his knees beneath

* *Bulletin of the Archæological Society of Touraine*, Vol. XII.

it. He continued to write in this manner until five o'clock in the evening, taking no other nourishment than his coffee and his slices of toasted bread.

"At five o'clock he arose, dressed for dinner, and remained with his hosts in the drawing-room until ten o'clock, the hour at which he withdrew to go to bed. And he never in the least modified this settled routine."

These sojourns at Saché were longer or shorter according to the stage of his work and the state of his purse. The servants at the château had learned to tell from his expression whether he was prosperous or hard-up; when he felt poor he met them with an affable air and kindly words, for that was all he had to give them; when he was rich he moved among them with the air of a prince. They pardoned his haughty manner because he was generous. M. de Margonne often aided him with loans, but in order to keep him as long as possible, he never gave him the money until the moment of his departure.

On leaving Paris for he knew not how long,

Honoré de Balzac entrusted his interests to his mother. They were of such opposite temperaments, the one imaginative and extravagant, staking his whole life and fortune on fabulous figures, and the other precise, calculating and rather austere, that they could hardly be expected to understand each other, and frequent clashes had blunted all their tenderer impulses. Mme. de Balzac could not understand her son's blunders, and blamed him severely for them. She suffered from his apparently dissipated life, his love of luxury, his belief in his own greatness, of which no evidence had yet been offered to her matter-of-fact mind. Still wholly unaware of his genius, she could not fail to misjudge him. Yet she had already sacrificed herself once to save him from bankruptcy; and, with all her frowning and grumbling, she would never refuse her aid and experience when he asked for it.

It was Mme. de Balzac who undertook to see the publishers and magazine editors, to pass upon the contracts, to follow up the negotiations already under way, and to conclude them;

in short, she represented her son in all respects in his badly involved business relations. From a distance he supervised operations, with a mathematical keenness of vision, and his mother assumed the responsibility of carrying out his wishes, bringing to the contest all her qualities of vigour, clear perception and crafty dealings. Honoré de Balzac did not spare her, for he estimated her endurance by his own; and no sooner was he installed at Saché than he began to give her instructions that were little short of orders. She must copy *The Grocer,* which the *Silhouette* had published, send him a copy of *Contes Bruns,* obtain from Mme. de Berny a volume of *The Chouans* with her corrections, read the article on Bernard Palissy in the great *Biographie Universelle,* copy it, and make note of all the works that Palissy had written or which had been written about him, then hurry with those notes to M. de Mame, the book-seller,—whom she was to present with copies of volumes III and IV of *Scenes of Private Life,* telling him that Honoré had had a fall and could not leave the

house,—and ask him to procure the works on her list,—then go to Laure, and read the notice on Bernard Palissy in "Papa's Biography," to see whether any other works are mentioned which were not included in the *Biographie Universelle,* and to buy elsewhere whatever M. de Mame did not have, if they were not too dear, and send them all as soon as possible. These works were all needed by Balzac as documents for the *Search for the Absolute,* which was meant to conclude the fourth volume of *Philosophic Tales,* published by Gosselin, —but probably they did not reach him in time, for the *Search for the Absolute* did not appear until 1834, and its place in the *Tales* was taken by the *Biographic Notice of Louis Lambert.*

To these express recommendations regarding his work Balzac added orders relative to his household. He "desired" that Leclercq should take out the horses half an hour each day; he concerned himself in regard to his outstanding debts, and he begged his mother to

find out what he owed for June and July, so that he could get her the money.

Those few months of fashionable life and his frequenting aristocratic clubs had put his affairs in a piteous state. Mme. de Balzac drew up a balance sheet, without any attempt to spare him, and pointed out just what sacrifices were necessary. He was in no position to meet the heavy demands, in spite of his desperate toil. A gleam of hope, however, came in the midst of his distress, for his friends at Saché held out prospects of a wealthy marriage; but this hope was an elusive one: the prospective bride was not expected in Touraine until the month of October, and how in the meantime was he to pay his pressing debts? He calculated the utmost that he could earn, he assumed certain advances, he added up and with the help of his optimism he swelled his prospective receipts, yet not sufficiently to satisfy his creditors. He groaned, for he did not wish to sell at a loss what he had acquired with such difficulty, despoil himself, strip himself bare like a St. John;—then his energy reawoke and

his self-confidence enabled him to accept the hard test. He consented to give up his horses,—for whose feed he was still owing, since he could not feed them on poetry, as he humorously wrote to Mme. de Girardin,—and his cabriolet. What matter? He was strong enough to rebuild the foundations of his fortune!

From now on Honoré de Balzac thought of nothing but his work. He wrote his *Biographical Notice of Louis Lambert* in thirty days and fifteen nights; but this effort was so prodigious that an apoplectic stroke prostrated him and he came very near dying. He endured his financial anxieties and empty purse, upheld by the certainty of his own genius. He knew how much unfinished work there was in the first version of his books and he had spells of artistic despair, but they were brief, for he relied on his strength of will to bring his writings to the perfection of which he dreamed. "This *Biographic Notice of Louis Lambert,*" he wrote to Laure, "is a work in which I have tried to rival Goethe and Byron, to out-do

Faust and *Manfred;* and the tilt is not over yet, for the proof sheets are not yet corrected. I do not know whether I shall succeed, but this fourth volume of *Philosophic Tales* ought to be a final reply to my enemies, and ought to show my incontestable superiority." When his family became concerned over his precarious situation, and the complications in which he had entangled himself, Balzac answered their reproaches by prophesying the future: "Yes, you are right," he said to Laure, "I shall not stop, I shall go on and on until I attain my goal, and you will see the day when I shall be numbered among the great minds of my country." Then, in the same letter, he added, for his mother's benefit: "Yes, you are right, my progress is real and my infernal courage will be rewarded. Persuade my mother to think so too, dear sister; tell her to show me the charity of a little patience; her devotion will be rewarded! Some day, I hope, a little glory will pay her for everything! Poor mother! The imagination with which she endowed me is a perpetual bewilderment to her;

she cannot tell north from south nor east from west; and that sort of journeying is fatiguing, as I know from experience!

"Tell my mother that I love her as I did when I was a child. Tears overcome me as I write these lines, tears of tenderness and despair, for I foresee the future, and I shall need that devoted mother on the day of my triumph! But when will that day come?"

Lastly, he explained the necessity of his isolation and excused himself for it: "Some day, when my works are developed, you will realise that it required many an hour to think out and write so many things; then you will absolve me for all that has displeased you, and you will pardon, not the egoism of the man (for he has none), but the egoism of the thinker and worker."

Towards the middle of July he left Saché in order to go to Angoulême, to visit Mme. Carraud, whose husband had been appointed Inspector of the Powder Works, just outside the town. He arrived there on the 17th, intending to stay five weeks and happy to have reached

this friendly asylum. Mme. Carraud was one of the women who had the most faith in Balzac; she was the recipient of his confidences, even the most delicate ones; and when his conduct displeased her she did not hesitate to take him to task. In her home Honoré was treated as a son of the family, and Commander Carraud also welcomed him with cordial affection. In their house, just as at Saché, he kept on with his work, for "I must work" was his life-long cry, which he sometimes uttered blithely, in the luminous joy of creation, and sometimes with a horrible breathlessness, as though he was gradually being crushed by the weight of his superhuman task. But he never succumbed. From the moment of his arrival at the Powder Works, notwithstanding the fatigue of the journey, he hardly gave himself time to clasp the hands of his friends before he plunged into the concluding chapters of *Louis Lambert;* and even when he was not writing he gave himself no rest, but set about the preparation of new works. He led an even more cloistered life here than at Saché, interrupting

all correspondence excepting business letters to his mother. For he was bent upon gaining two things, money and fame. Besides, there were the corrections to be made in *The Chouans,* in the fourth volume of the *Philosophic Tales,* and he was writing *The Battle* (which never was published), the *Contes Drolatiques,* the *Studies of Women,* the *Conversations between Eleven o'Clock and Midnight, La Grenadière* (written in one night), and *The Accursed Child,* and at the same time was planning *The Country Doctor,* one of his most important works.

Meanwhile, Mme. Carraud was proud of her guest. She entertained her friends at the Powder Works, the father and mother of Alberic Second, and M. Berges, principal of the high school, who was later to support Balzac's candidacy in Angoulême. The local paper, the *Charentais,* had announced the presence of the author of *The Magic Skin,* and when he went to have his hair cut by the barber, Fruchet, in the Place du Marché, he was the object of public attention. The young men of the demo-

cratic club called upon him and assured him that they would support his candidacy, in spite of his aristocratic opinions. Balzac awoke to a consciousness of the value of his name, and in the letters to his mother dealing with business relations with his publishers assumed a more commanding tone. She need not trouble herself further, he wrote, in calling on magazine editors; she was to send for M. Pichot, editor of the *Revue de Paris,* to come to her house, and she was to lay down certain conditions, which he could accept or refuse, according to whether he wanted more of Balzac's copy or not. Pichot must agree in writing to pay two hundred francs a page, with no reduction for blank spaces. Balzac was to be at liberty to reprint the published articles in book form, and no disagreeable paragraph in reference to himself or his works was to be published in the magazine. So much for M. Pichot! Next, she was to summon M. Buloz, of the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* to come in his turn to her house, and here are the detailed instructions which Mme. de Balzac was to follow in his case: "You

will show him the manuscript, without letting him take it with him, because you are only an *agent* and do not know the usual customs. Be very polite.

"You will tell him that I wish him to write a letter promising not to print anything displeasing to me in his magazine, either directly or indirectly;

"That he shall give a receipt for all outstanding accounts, with settlement in full up to September 1, 1832, between me and the *Revue;*

"That my contributions are to be printed in the largest sized type;

"And paid at the rate of two hundred francs a page, without deduction for blank spaces.

"After he has agreed in writing to these terms, let him have *The Orphans* (the definitive title of which was *La Grenadière*);

"Buloz must have a good article written on the *Scenes* and the fourth volume of the *Philosophic Tales.*"

Having taken this masterful tone, Balzac gave his mother this final practical recommen-

dation, never to give credit to any periodical and to demand the money immediately after publication of the article!

Having made all his plans in detail, Balzac left Angoulême on August 22, 1832, in order to join Mme. de Castries at the waters of Aix. It was an amorous adventure, yet he did not enter into it without certain misgivings, for he did not know whether the duchess was sincere or whether she was playing with his feelings. Nevertheless, he set out joyously, although lightly equipped in the way of money,—Commander Carraud was obliged to lend him a hundred and fifty francs,—but with several stories begun and plenty of work on hand, for nothing, not even the hope of being loved by a woman of high position, could make him forget his work. He arrived at Limoges, where he saw Mme. Nivet, Mme. Carraud's sister, who had bought him some enamels, and to whom he applied to superintend his orders of porcelain. Faithful to his method of documentation, he visited the sights of the city rapidly, within a few hours, and such was his keenness of vision

and tenacity of memory that he was able afterwards to describe it all exactly, down to the slightest details. On the very evening after his arrival at Angoulême he set forth for Lyons, but the journey was fated not to be made without an accident, for in descending from an outside seat of the coach, at Thiers, Balzac struck his knee against one of the steps so violently that—in view of his heavy weight—he received a painful wound on his shin. He was tended at Lyons, the wound healed, and he profited by his enforced quiet to correct *Louis Lambert* and to add to it those "last thoughts" which form one of the highest monuments of human intelligence.

Honoré de Balzac installed himself at Aix, near Mme. de Castries. He was happy, for she had received him with a thousand charming coquetries; and he had paid his court to her, yet he did not interrupt his work for a single day! "I have a simple little chamber," he wrote to Mme. Carraud, "from which I can see the entire valley. I force myself pitilessly to rise at five o'clock in the morning, and I work

beside my window until five-thirty in the afternoon. My breakfast, an egg, is sent in from the club. Mme. de Castries has some good coffee made for me. At six o'clock we dine together, and I pass the evening with her."

Balzac lived economically. His chamber cost him two francs a day and his breakfast fifteen sous. Yet, after having rendered an account of his expenses to his mother, he was obliged to ask her for money; and he played her another of his characteristic neat little tricks. At Aix he had happened to run across a certain Auguste Sannegou, to whom he owed eleven hundred francs. And, as the latter had just been losing rather heavily, he offered to reimburse him, an offer which Sannegou lost no time in accepting with pleasure. Consequently it became necessary for Mme. de Balzac to send her son the eleven hundred francs post-haste, plus two hundred francs which he needed for his personal expenses. His mother made the sacrifice,—for he sent her a beautiful account of perspective revenues: 3,000 francs from the *Revue de Paris*, 2,000 francs for *La*

Bataille, 2,000 francs for a volume of *Contes Drolatiques,* 5,000 for four new volumes to be brought out by Mame, total, 9,000 francs,—and after he received the money he acknowledged that he paid only half the sum due to Sannegou, and kept the rest for a trip to Italy.

The Fitz-James family came to rejoin the duchess; Balzac was exultant; he had been exceedingly well treated and had been promised a seat as deputy, if a general election took place; and he was to go to Rome in the same pleasant company. But he lacked money, and the sums which his mother was about to collect in Paris were destined to meet maturing notes. Besides, he was anxious to finish, without further delay, *The Country Doctor,* which he announced to his publisher, Mame, in triumphant terms:

"Be doubly attentive, Master Mame!" he wrote. "I have been for a long time imbued with a desire for that form of popular fame which consists in selling many thousands of copies of a little 18mo volume like *Atala, Paul and Virginia, The Vicar of Wakefield, Manon*

Lescaut, Perrault, etc., etc. The multiplicity of editions offsets the lack of a number of volumes. But the book must be one which can pass into all hands, those of the young girl, the child, the old man, and even the nun. When the book once becomes known,—which will take a long or a short time, according to the talent of the author and the ability of the publisher,—it becomes a matter of importance. For example: the *Meditations* of Lamartine, of which sixty thousand copies were sold; the *Ruins* by Volny, etc.

"Accordingly, this is the spirit in which my book is conceived, a book which the janitor's wife and the fashionable lady can both read. I have taken the New Testament and the Catechism, two books of excellent quality, and have wrought my own from them. I have laid the scene in a village,—and, for the rest, you will read it *in its entirety,* a thing which rarely happens to a book of mine."

For this work Balzac demanded a franc a volume, or seventy-five centimes at least, and an advance of a thousand francs. This sum

was indispensable if he was to go to Italy. The trip began in October, under happy auspices, and on the 16th they stopped over at Geneva. From there Balzac sent his mother two samples of flannel which he had worn over his stomach. He wanted her to show them to M. Chapelain, a practitioner of medical magnetism, in order to consult him regarding a malady which he suspected that he had, and ask him where it was located and what treatment he should follow. Balzac was a believer in occult sciences, and once before, during the epidemic of cholera in 1832, he wrote to M. Chapelain, asking if he could not discover the origin of the scourge and find remedies capable of stopping it. It was not only magnetism that interested him, but clairvoyance as well, fortune tellers and readers of cards, to whom he attributed an acuteness of perception unknown to ordinary natures.

This enjoyable trip was destined to end at Geneva, so far as Balzac was concerned. Whether he realised that Mme. de Castries was merely playing with his affections, or whether

his pride was hurt by some unlucky phrase, no one knows, but he suddenly deserted his companions and returned to France, offering as a pretext the urgency of his literary work. This adventure left an open wound, and it took more than five years to cure him. He suffered cruelly, and we get an echo of his pain in the line in the *Country Doctor,* "For wounded hearts, darkness and silence." He avenged himself on Mme. de Castries by writing *The Duchess of Langeais,* in which he showed how a society woman amused herself by torturing a sensitive and sincere gentleman.

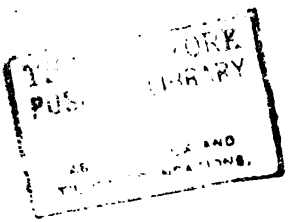






MME. HANSKA AND BALZAC

Above: Mme. Hanska, whom the great novelist married in 1850, a few months before his death.—Balzac, from the painting by Louis Boulanger. *Below:* Mme. Hanska's Chateau at Wiertzkownia in Poland, where Balzac lived from 1848 until his return to France.


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CHAPTER VII

THE "FOREIGN LADY"

AFTER his return to Paris, Balzac threw himself into a frightful orgy of work. It would seem as though his one desire was to forget the coquette who had so cruelly punished him for loving her, and as though he felt the need of atoning to himself for the hours that she had taken him from his work. His physician, Dr. Nacquart, feared that he would break down, and prescribed a month's rest, during which time he was neither to read nor write, but lead a purely vegetative life. Yet, in spite of this injunction, he found himself unable to stop working, for he was urged on by his genius, and hounded by the terrible necessity of meeting maturing notes, as well as by his own luxurious tastes which must be satisfied at any cost. He had the most extravagant hopes of big returns from *The Country Doc-*

tor; and in this belief his friends encouraged him. Emile de Girardin and Auguste Borget estimated that the book would sell to the extent of four hundred thousand copies. It was proposed to bring out a one-franc edition which was expected to circulate broadcast, like prayer-books. Balzac made his own calculations,—for he was eternally making calculations,—and, relying confidently upon their accuracy, allowed himself to purchase carpets, bric-à-brac, a Limoges dinner set, a silver service and jewellery, all for the adornment of the small den in the Rue Cassini. He ordered chandeliers; he stopped short of nothing save a silver chafing-dish. He piled debts upon debts: but what difference did it make, for success was before him, within reach of his hand, and he would have no trouble at all to pay!

Alas, none of the actualities of life would ever break down his robust confidence nor his golden dreams! Even before *The Country Doctor* was published he found himself involved in a law suit with his publisher, and after its appearance the public press criticised it sharply.

"Everyone has his knife out for me," he wrote to Mme. Hanska, "a situation which saddened and angered Lord Byron only makes me laugh. I mean to govern the intellectual world of Europe, and with two more years of patience and toil I shall trample on the heads of all those who now wish to tie my hands and retard my flight! Persecution and injustice have given me a brazen courage."

After each of his disillusions he had arisen again stronger than before; and at this juncture a new element had entered into his life which gave him an augmented energy and courage. This element was the one secret romance of his life, which gave rise to a host of anecdotes and legends. In the month of February, 1832, his publisher, Gosselin, forwarded a letter to him, signed *L'Étrangère,* "A Foreign Lady," which caught his attention by the nobility of the thoughts expressed in it. This first letter was followed by several others, and in one of them, dated November 7th, the "Foreign Lady" requested him to let her know of its safe arrival: "A line from you, published in

La Quotidienne, will assure me that you have received my letter, and that I may write to you without fear. Sign it, *À L'É. H. de B.* ('To the Foreign Lady from H. de B.')." The line requested appeared in *La Quotidienne,* in its issue of December 9th, and thus began a long and almost daily correspondence which was destined to last for seventeen years.

The "Foreign Lady" was a Polish woman of noble birth, Mme. Hanska, who before her marriage was Countesse Eveline Rzewuska, who lived at her château of Wierschownia, in Volhynia, with her husband, who possessed vast estates, and her daughter, Anna, who was still a child. Mme. Hanska had read the *Scenes from Private Life,* and she had been filled with enthusiasm for the author's talent and with a great hope of being able to exert an influence over his mind and to direct his ideas.

The mysterious nature of this strange correspondence pleased Balzac: he was able, in the course of it, to give free rein to his imagination, and at the same time to picture her to himself as a type of woman such as he had

longed for through many years, endowing her with a beauty which represented all the virtues. His first letters, although dignified and reserved, nevertheless revealed the fact that he was seeking for some woman in whom he could confide, and very soon he began to pour out his heart freely. It is in this collection of letters, which extend from January, 1833, down to 1847, that we must search for the true details of his life, rather than in any of those collections of doubtful anecdotes, which show it only in the distorted form of caricature, and only too often have no foundation of truth. Nevertheless it is necessary to read them with a certain amount of critical reservation, for he often shows himself in them in a false light, which probably seemed necessary to him, in order to carry out the diplomatic course which he had undertaken, and which terminated in his marriage.

From 1833 onward he was destined to lead a double life, the one before the eyes of the world, with its gesticulations, its eccentricities, its harlequinades, that left the lookers-on gap-

ing with amazement; and the other his secret life, which he revealed only to Mme. Hanska, day by day,—his slave-like toil, his burden of debts which no amount of effort seemed to lighten, his prodigious hopes, and from time to time his desperate weariness.

After the publication of *The Country Doctor* the confused plan of his vast work took more definite form, the scattered parts began to fit together, and he foresaw the immense monument in which he was destined to embody an entire social epoch.

"The day when he was first inspired with this idea was a wonderful day for him," Mme. Surville has recorded. "He set forth from the Rue Cassini, where he had taken up his residence after leaving the Rue de Tournon, and hurried to the Faubourg Poissonnière, where I was then living.

" 'Salute me,' he cried out joyously, 'for I am on the high road to become a genius!'

"He then proceeded to unfold his plan to us, although it still rather frightened him. In spite of the vastness of his brain, time alone

would enable him to work out such a plan in detail!

" 'How splendid it will be if I succeed!' he said as he strode up and down the parlour; he was too excited to remain in one place and joy radiated from all his features. 'From now on they are welcome to call me *Balzac the tale-smith!* I shall go on tranquilly squaring my stones and enjoying in advance the amazement of all these purblind critics when they finally discover the great structure that I am building!' "

What vital force there was in all the characters of Balzac's novels, and how well entitled he was to boast that he was running in competition with the whole social structure! He had not yet formulated his conception of the *Human Comedy,* but he was on the road to it when he planned to rearrange the volumes already published with others that he had in preparation, in a series of scenes in which the representative types of the different social classes should develop. This was the first rough draft of his later great collected editions.

In order to carry out his plan, he had to break with his former publishers, pay back advance royalties, and defend law-suits. His collective edition took the general title of *Studies of the Manners and Customs of the Nineteenth Century,* and was divided into *Scenes of Private Life, Scenes of Provincial Life,* and *Scenes of Parisian Life.* He gave the rights of publication of this collective edition first to Madame the Widow Béchet and later to Edmond Werclet, in consideration of the sum of twenty-seven thousand francs. This was the most advantageous contract that he had made up to this time, and he hoped that it would free him from all his debts, with the exception of what he owed his mother. In addition to his previously published volumes, he included in this edition the following new works: *Eugénie Grandet, The Illustrious Gaudissart, The Maranas, Ferragus, The Duchess of Langeais, The Girl with the Golden Eyes, The Search for the Absolute, The Marriage Contract, The Old Maid,* and the first part of *Lost Illusions.*

But he did not include either *The Chouans* or his philosophic works.

Twenty-seven thousand francs was an enormous sum, without parallel save that paid to Chateaubriand for his collected works; but in Balzac's case the payment was made in the form of notes for long periods, and he was left without ready money. In the midst of all his other labours he had to rack his brain in order to find some way of cashing these notes. "Finding that I had nothing to hope for from the bankers," he wrote to Mme. Hanska, "I remembered that I owed three hundred francs to my doctor, so I called upon him in order to settle my account with one of my bits of negotiable paper, and he gave me change amounting to seven hundred francs, minus the discount. From there I made my way to my landlord, an old grain dealer in the *Halle,* and paid my rent with another of my notes, which he accepted, giving me back another seven hundred francs, minus the exchange; from him I went to my tailor, who, without demur, took over another of my

thousand franc notes, entered it in his ledger, and paid me the whole thousand francs!

"Seeing that I was in for a run of luck, I took a cab and drove to the home of a friend, who is a millionaire twice over, a friend of twenty years' standing. As it happened, he had just returned from Berlin. I found him in, and at once he hurried to his desk, gave me two thousand francs, and relieved me of two more of the Widow Béchet's notes, without even looking at them. Ha! ha!—I returned to my rooms and summoned my vendor of wood and my grocer, in order to settle my accounts, and, in place of a five hundred franc bank note, slipped each of them one of the widow's five hundred franc promissory notes! By four o'clock I was free once more and ready to meet the next day's obligations. My mind is at ease for a month to come. I can seat myself once more in the fragile swing of my dreams and let my imagination keep me swinging. *Ecco, Signora!*

"My dear, faithful wife-to-be, did I not owe you this faithful picture of your future home

life in Paris? Yes, but here are five thousand francs squandered, out of the twenty-seven thousand, and before setting out for Geneva I still have ten thousand to pay: three thousand to my mother, one thousand to my sister, and six thousand in judgments and costs.—'Good gracious, my dear man, where will you raise all that?'—Out of my ink-well!" *

The tone of the correspondence had become more tender and confidential, mirroring back an intimate picture of a laborious existence, laden with anxieties,—and the reason is that Balzac now knew his "Foreign Lady," for he had met her at Neufchâtel, whence he returned overflowing with enthusiasm. From the date of the very first letters he had received his imagination had taken fire, and he had responded with an answering ardour to this woman who had so ingenuously laid bare her heart to him. It was a romantic adventure upon which he set forth rejoicing. He had sent to the fair unknown a lock of his hair, which he had allowed to remain for some time uncut, in order

* Letter dated October 31, 1833.

to send one as long as possible; he had presented her with a perfumed casket, destined to be the mysterious receptacle of his letters; a friend had drawn a sketch of his apartment in the Rue Cassini, so that she might see what a pleasant little den the toiler had; and lastly he inserted in a copy of *The Country Doctor* an aquarelle, in which he was portrayed in the somewhat exaggerated guise of his own Doctor Bernassis. This was a sacrifice to which he consented for love's sake, because he had always refused to let any one, even Gérard, paint his portrait, insisting "that he was not handsome enough to be worth preserving in oil."

But letter-writing and delicate attentions in the form of gifts were far from satisfying him. He wanted to see her, to talk with her, to put into speech shades of feeling so delicate that the written word was powerless to reproduce them. And presently chance aided and abetted him. Mme. Hanska left Wierzchownia for a summer vacation in Switzerland, and Balzac, on the trail of one of those business opportunities for which he was ever on the watch, was obliged to go to

Besançon at precisely the same season. His mission related to the manufacture of a special kind of paper, to be made exclusively for his works, and which he imagined would speedily make his fortune. Since she was to be at Neufchâtel and he at Besançon, how could they resist the pleasure of a first meeting? Permission was asked to call, and permission was granted; and Balzac, impatient and intoxicated with hope, left Paris, September 22d, arrived at Neufchâtel on the 25th, and for five days enjoyed profound happiness, tender and unalloyed. They met, and the sentiments born of their correspondence, far from being destroyed by this meeting, were on the contrary exalted into trembling avowals, transports and protestations of eternal love. Balzac returned to Paris radiant with his new-found joy. He wrote as follows to his sister Laure, the habitual recipient of his confidences:

"I found down yonder all that is needed to flatter the thousand vanities of that animal known as man, of which species the poet still remains the vainest variety. But why do I use

the word *vanity?* No, that has nothing to do with it. I am happy, very happy in thought, and so far all for the best and in all honour. . . .

"I say nothing to you of her colossal wealth; of what consequence is that, beside a perfection of beauty which I can compare to no one except the Princess of Bellejoyeuse, only infinitely better?"

Mme. Hanska was profoundly religious and a practical Catholic; and from this time onward she exerted an influence over the trend of Balzac's thoughts. Indeed, he brought back from their first interviews the germ idea of his mystical story, *Séraphita.* The project of the special paper having failed to materialise at Besançon, he tried to carry it out through the mediation of Mme. Carraud, but with no better success.

The Country Doctor proved a source of nothing but disappointments to Balzac, who received an adverse decision from the courts, in the lawsuit brought by Mame, because he had failed to furnish copy at the stipulated dates, and found himself facing a judgment of three thousand

francs damages, besides another thousand francs for corrections made at his expense. The cost of the latter was, for that matter, always charged to him by his publishers in all his contracts, because his method of work raised this item to an unreasonable sum. For one of his short stories, *Pierrette,* Balzac demanded no less than seventeen successive revised proofs. And his corrections, his additions and his suppressions formed such an inextricable tangle that the typesetters refused to work more than an hour at a time over his copy.

The failure of the work on which he had counted so much and the loss of his lawsuit did not discourage him. To borrow his own phrase, he "buried himself in the most frightful labours." Between the end of 1833 and 1834 he produced *Eugénie Grandet, The Illustrious Gaudissart, The Girl with the Golden Eyes,* and *The Search for the Absolute.* The paper which he used for writing was a large octavo in form, with a parchment finish. His manuscripts often bore curious annotations and drawings. On the cover of that of *Eugénie*

Grandet he had drawn a ground plan of old Grandet's house, and had compiled a list of names from which he chose those of the characters in the story. Balzac attached an extreme importance to proper names, and he did not decide which to give to his heroes until after long meditation, for he believed that names were significant, even to the extent of influencing their destinies. The manuscript of *The Search for the Absolute* bears witness to his constant preoccupation about money. He had inscribed on it the following account:

Total for June	7,505 fcs.
Total for July	1,500 fcs.
Floating debt	3,700 fcs.
	12,705 fcs.

And melancholically he wrote below it, "*Deficit,* 1,705!" His writing was small, compressed, irregular and often far from easy to read; when he suppressed a passage, he used a form of pothook erasure which rendered the condemned phrase absolutely illegible.

In 1834, Honoré de Balzac, while still keeping

his apartment in the Rue Cassini, transferred his residence to Chaillot, No. 13, Rue des Batailles (now the Avenue d'Iena), in a house situated on the site of the hotel of Prince Roland Bonaparte. This was his bachelor quarters, where he received his letters, under the name of Madame the Widow Durand. He had by no means abandoned his projects of luxurious surroundings, and in *The Girl with the Golden Eyes* he has given a description of his own parlour, which shows that he had in a measure already realised his desires:

"One-half of the boudoir," he wrote, "described an easy and graceful semicircle, while the opposite side was perfectly square, and in the centre glistened a mantelpiece of white marble and gold. The entrance was through a side door, hidden by a rich portière of tapestry, and facing a window. Within the horseshoe curve was a genuine Turkish divan, that is to say, a mattress resting directly upon the floor, a mattress as large as a bed, a divan fifty feet in circumference and covered with white cashmere, relieved by tufts of black and poppy-red silk ar-

ranged in a diamond pattern. The headboard of this immense bed rose several inches above the numerous cushions which still further enriched it by the good taste of their harmonious tints. The walls of this boudoir were covered with red cloth, overlaid with India muslin fluted like a Corinthian column, the flutings being alternately hollowed and rounded, and finished at top and bottom with a band of poppy-red cloth embroidered with black arabesques. Seen through the muslin, the poppy-red turned to rose colour, the colour emblematic of love; and the same effect was repeated in the window curtains, which were also of India muslin lined with rose-coloured taffeta and ornamented with fringes of mixed black and poppy-red. Six vermilion sconces, each containing two candles, were fixed at even intervals to the wall, for the purpose of lighting the divan. The ceiling, from the centre of which hung a chandelier of dull vermilion, was a dazzling white, and the cornice was gilded. The carpet resembled an Oriental shawl, exhibiting the patterns and recalling the poetry of Persia, the land where it

had been woven by the hands of slaves. The furniture was all upholstered in white cashmere, emphasised by trimmings of the same combination of black and poppy-red. The clock, the candle-sticks, all the ornaments, were of white marble and gold. The only table in the room had a cashmere covering. Graceful jardinières contained roses of all species having blossoms of red or white."

Théophile Gautier has borne witness to the accuracy of this description; but as though wishing to show him the double aspect of his life, Balzac, after willingly exhibiting in detail all the luxury of his boudoir, led him to a corner recess, necessitated by the rounded form of one side of the room; and there, hidden behind the ostentatious decoration, there was nothing but a narrow iron cot, a table and a chair; this was where he worked.

Balzac disliked being disturbed while working; and, for the double reason of avoiding unwelcome visitors and throwing his creditors off the scent, he had invented a whole series of pass-words, which it was necessary to know be-

fore one could penetrate to his apartment. A visitor, let into the secret, would say to the porter, "The season for plums has arrived," thanks to which he acquired the right to enter the house. But this was only the first degree of initiation. A servant would next come forward and ask, "What does Monsieur wish?" and one had to be able to answer, "I have brought some Brussels lace." This constituted the second degree and resulted in permission to ascend the stairs. Then, with the door of the sanctuary just ajar, the visitor could not hope to see it swing fully open before him until he had made the assertion that "Mme. Durand was in good health!" Whenever Balzac suspected that his pass-words had been betrayed, he invented a new set, which he communicated only to those few chosen spirits whom he cared to receive. And this method of protecting himself caused him, when with his friends, to indulge in great outbursts of his vast, resounding laughter.

In spite of envy and conspiracies, Balzac's reputation was now established; he had become one of those writers who are widely discussed

and whose sayings and doings are a current topic of conversation. At the same time, he was the prey of the low-class journals, which attacked him maliciously. At this period, Balzac was passing through a second attack of dandyism. He was once again to be seen at the *Opéra,* at the *Bouffes* and at the fashionable *salons.* He sported a monstrous walking stick, the handle of which was set with turquoises; he showed himself in the box occupied by an ultra-fashionable set known as the "Tigers," wearing a blue coat, adorned with golden buttons, "buttons," he said, "wrought by the hand of a fairy"; and he had a "divine lorgnette," which had been made for him by the optician of the Observatory. He began to be laughed at; and, gossip taking a hand, his glorious luxury was attributed to the generosity of an elderly Englishwoman, Lady Anelsy, whose lucky favourite he was supposed to be. His walking stick especially—a stick that, in his estimation, was worthy of Louis XIV—excited curiosity. It was ridiculed, decried and admired. Mme. de Girardin wrote a novel

around it, *Monsieur de Balzac's Walking Stick,* in which she attributed to it the power of rendering invisible whoever held it in his left hand.

He had a carriage adorned with his monogram, surmounted by the arms of the d'Entragues; he frequented the salons of the Rothschilds, and of Mme. Appony, the wife of the Austrian ambassador; he gave magnificent dinners to Lautour-Mezeray, to Sandeau, to Nodier, to Malitourne and to Rossini, who declared that he had "never seen, eaten or drunken anything better, even at the tables of kings."

Then, suddenly, Balzac returned to the fierce heat of production; he abandoned his friends and acquaintances, and became invisible for months at a time, buried in his hiding-place at Chaillot, or else taking refuge at the home of M. de Margonne at Saché, or of Mme. Carraud at Frapésle. And when he reappeared, it was with his hands laden with masterpieces, his eye more commanding and his brow held high with noble pride. With a speed of production that no one has ever equalled he turned forth, one

after another, his great novels, *Old Goriot, The Lily in the Valley, Séraphita, The Atheist's Mass, The Interdiction, The Cabinet of Antiques, Facino Cane,* and he revised, corrected and remodelled a part of his earlier works into the *Philosophic Studies* which he brought out through Werdet, and his *Studies of Manners,* published by Mme. Béchet. His plan had grown still larger, the formidable creation with which his brain was teeming was taking organic shape, and he now perceived the architecture of his vast monument. He expounded it to Mme. Hanska, with justifiable pride:

"I believe that by 1838 the three divisions of this gigantic work will be, if not completed, at least superposed, so that it will be possible to judge of the mass of the structure.

"The *Studies of Manners* are intended to represent all social effects so completely that no situation in life, no physiognomy, no character of man or woman, no manner of living, no profession, no social zone, no section of France, nor anything whatever relating to childhood,

maturity or old age, to politics, justice or war, shall be forgotten.

"This being determined, the history of the human heart traced thread by thread, and the history of society recorded in all its parts, we have the foundation. There will be no imaginary incidents in it; it will consist solely of what is happening everywhere.

"Then comes the second story of my structure, the *Philosophic Studies,* for after the *effects* we shall examine the *causes.* In the *Studies of Manners* I shall already have painted for you the play of the emotions and the movement of life. In the *Philosophic Studies* I shall expound the *why* of the emotions and the *wherefore* of life; what is the range and what are the conditions outside of which neither society nor man can exist; and, after having surveyed society in order to describe it, I shall survey it again in order to judge it. Accordingly the *Studies of Manners* contain typical *individuals,* while the *Philosophic Studies* contain individualised *types.* Thus on all sides I shall have created life: for the type by individ-

ualising it, and for the individual by converting him into a type. I shall endow the fragment with thought, and I shall have endowed thought with individual life.

"Then, after the *effects* and *causes,* will come the *Analytic Studies,* of which the *Physiology of Marriage* will form part: for after the *effects* and *causes,* the next thing to be sought is the *principles.* The *manners* are the *performance,* the *causes* are the *stage setting* and *properties,* and the *principles* are the *author;* but in proportion as my work circles higher and higher into the realms of thought, it narrows and condenses. If it requires twenty-four volumes for the *Studies of Manners,* it will not require more than fifteen for the *Philosophic Studies,* and it will not require more than nine for the *Analytic Studies.* In this way, man, society and humanity will have been described, judged and analysed, without repetition, resulting in a work which will stand as the *Thousand and One Nights of the Occident.*

"When the whole is completed, my edifice achieved, my pediment sculptured, my scaffold-

ing cleared away, my final touches given, it will be proved that I was either right or wrong. But after having been a poet, after having demonstrated an entire social system, I shall revert to science in an *Essay on the Human Powers.* And around the base of my palatial structure, with boyish glee I shall trace the immense arabesque of my *Hundred Droll Tales.*"

Think of the courage that it needed not to recoil before this superhuman task, planned with such amplitude and precision! Yet, aside from a few rare days of discouragement, Balzac did not feel that it was beyond his powers. After each brief period of weakening, his optimism always reappeared, and, having indicated his goal, he concluded: "Some day when I have finished, we can have a good laugh. But today I must work."

Accordingly he worked, not only "today," but every day, in the midst of the material uncertainty created by his accumulated debts, his lawsuits, and his need of luxury; and his method of work was to retire at six o'clock in the evening, rise at two in the morning, and remain

sometimes more than sixteen hours before his table, wrestling with his task.

Nevertheless he was able to escape in May, 1835, for a trip to Vienna to see Mme. Hanska, enjoy a fortnight of happiness, and return to Paris with his heart in holiday mood. His good humour never deserted him. He related how, lacking any knowledge of German, he devised a way of paying his postilion. At each relay he summoned him to the door of the carriage and, looking him fixedly in the eye, dropped kreutzers into his hands one by one, and when he saw the postilion smile he withdrew the last kreutzer, knowing that he had been amply paid!

Returning to Paris by the eleventh of June, Balzac found nothing but a new crop of sorrows and anxieties awaiting him, together with "three or four months of hard labour" in perspective. His publisher, Werdet, had not been able to meet his payments, and his sister Laure had been obliged to pawn all her brother's silver at the Mont-de-Piété, in order to save the notes from being protested. On the other hand, his mother was seriously ill; it was feared the re-

sult would be either death or insanity, and his brother Henri had reached a state in which he was on the point of blowing out his brains. Family sorrows, money troubles, such was perpetually his fate! and accordingly he redoubled his courage. He had been working not more than sixteen hours consecutively, but now he worked for twenty-four at a stretch, and after five hours' sleep began again this new schedule which practically meant an average of twenty-one and one-half working hours per day. He would be able to earn eight thousand francs, but in order to do so he must deliver within forty days the last chapters of *Séraphita* and the *Young Brides* to the *Revue de Paris,* the *Lily in the Valley* to the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* and an article for the *Conservateur,* all of which was equivalent to writing four hundred and forty-eight pages.

And still this did not satisfy him! His ambition pushed him once again towards his earlier political designs. He counted upon the support of the reviews for which he was writing, he planned to found two newspapers, and dreamed

of creating a party composed of the intellectual element, of which he would naturally be the leader. It was in this spirit that, during the last months of 1835, he acquired the *Chronique de Paris,* of which he became the director. To this weekly periodical, which henceforth appeared twice a week, Balzac summoned a brilliant editorial staff—he always disdained to supervise any other than shining lights—including Gustave Planche, Nodier, Théophile Gautier, Charles de Bernard, while the illustrations were furnished by Gavarni and Daumier. Since he already aspired to a foreign ministry or ambassadorship, he reserved the department of foreign affairs for himself, and for more than a year he treated of European diplomacy with extraordinary penetration and accuracy. He made prodigious efforts to keep his review on its feet, but in spite of his activity and the talent of his collaborators, the *Chronique* exerted little or no influence, and remained very poor in subscribers.

While he was still editing it he once more underwent the singular and vexatious experience

of being imprisoned. Although a good citizen, he energetically refused to fulfill his duties in the national guard, which he deemed unbefitting the dignity of an artist and author. In March, 1835, he had already been detained for seven days in the Hôtel Bazancourt; so in order to avoid a similar annoyance in the future he hired his apartment under another name than his own. But his sergeant-major, a dentist by profession and a man of resource, succeeded in capturing him and landing him safely in the "Hôtel des Haricots." * He was locked up without a penny in his pocket, and in order to soften the rigours of his captivity must needs appeal for help to his publisher, Werdet. His hardships, however, proved to be tolerably mild when once he was supplied with money. In the prison he met Eugène Sue, who was detained for the same cause, and who carried the thing off in lordly fashion, having sumptuous repasts brought to him on his own silver service. Owing to this attitude there was a certain cold-

*Popular nickname for the debtors' prison. (*Translator's Note.*)

ness at first between the two novelists, but before long they joined forces in order to enliven their days of imprisonment. Eugène Sue could draw, and he made a pen-and-ink sketch of a horse, a horseman and a stretch of seashore, which Balzac inscribed as follows: "Drawn in prison in the Hôtel Bazancourt, where we were under punishment for not having mounted guard, in accordance with the decree of the grocers of Paris."

A still harsher prison, that of Clichy, very nearly fell to Balzac's lot, a few months later. His efforts to carry on the *Chronique* had been in vain, and he had been obliged to abandon it, toward the middle of 1837, with a fresh accumulation of debts. One of his creditors, William Duckett, pressed him so vigorously for a sum of ten thousand francs that Balzac was forced to go into hiding, and the process-servers were unable to discover him. A woman finally betrayed his retreat, and one morning the officers of the law presented themselves at the home of Mme. de Visconti, the lady who had given him asylum. Balzac was caught, but not taken, for

the generous woman promptly paid the debt demanded of him.

Once again he had been saved, but now all his creditors were at his heels, and he was like a hare before them, never sure where he could lay his head. In order to satisfy them he added toil to toil, story to story; notwithstanding the sorrow caused him by the loss of Mme. de Berny, that early love who had protected his youth and sustained his courage, with an unwavering devotion, a heart of wife and mother in one. His troubles were now constant, and he was forced to carry on a famous litigation with Buloz, director of the *Revue des Deux Mondes,* who had forwarded to the *Revue Étrangère* of St. Petersburg uncorrected proofs of *The Lily in the Valley.* In defending himself he was defending the common rights of all authors.

Théophile Gautier, whom he had invited to collaborate on the *Chronique de Paris* at a time when the author of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* was but little known, has left some vivid recollections of Balzac at this period:

"It was," he writes, "in that same boudoir



BALZAC IN CARACATURE

Above: The high road to Posterity, by Benjamin Roubaud, including Victor Hugo, Théophile Gautier, F. Weill, Eugène Sue, A. Dumas, F. Soulié, Balzac, A. de Vigny, Gozlan, C. Delavigne. *Below:* Balzac, by Etienne Carjat and by Benjamin.

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(the luxurious chamber in the Rue des Batailles) that he gave us a splendid dinner, on which occasion he lighted with his own hands all the candles in the vermilion sconces as well as those in the chandelier and candlesticks. The guests were the Marquis de B. . . (de Belloy) and the artist L. B. (Louis Boulanger). Although quite sober and abstemious by habit, Balzac did not disdain on occasion the festive board and flowing bowl; he ate with a whole-hearted satisfaction that was appetising to see, and he drank in true Pantagruelian fashion. Four bottles of the white wine of Vouvray, one of the headiest wines known, in no way affected his strong brain, and produced no other result than to add a slightly keener sparkle to his gaiety.

"Characteristic touch! At this splendid feast, furnished by Chevot, there was no bread. But when one has all the superfluities, of what use are the necessities?"

Balzac, who ordinarily ate quite soberly, consumed an enormous quantity of fruit, pears, strawberries and grapes. He held that they

were good for his health, and that they suited his temperament, overheated as it was by his abuse of coffee and his sleepless nights. Alcohol did not agree with him, and as to tobacco, he detested it to such a degree that he refused to employ servants who had the habit of smoking.

His intellectual conceptions intermingled with the current events of life, and he drew no very clear line of demarcation between the characters and adventures which he created and the actualities of life. The *History of the Thirteen* and the exploits of the association of which Ferragus was chief gave Balzac the idea of forming a secret society, after the manner of the one he had conceived, the members of which were to afford one another aid and protection under all circumstances. This society he called the *Red Horse,* from the name of the restaurant where the charter members met. They were Théophile Gautier, Léon Gozlan, Alphonse Karr, Louis Desnoyers, Eugène Guinot, Altaroche, Merle, and Granier de Cassagnac, all of whom swore the oath of fidelity and enthu-

siastically named Balzac Grand Master of the new order. The place of meeting was changed each week, in order not to attract the attention of the waiters who served the "Horses,"—cabalistic name of the conspirators,—and their secret had to be carefully guarded, for it was nothing less than a project for distributing among the members of the *Red Horse* the chief offices of State, the ministries and ambassadorships, the highest positions in arts and letters, the Académie Française and the Institut. These secret reunions ceased after a few months, for there was no more corn in the crib,—in other words, a majority of the "Horses" were unable to pay their dues.

Did these chimerical dreams serve to distract Balzac's thoughts from the realities, or did he believe that he possessed some occult means of dominating society? Perhaps it was something of both. His material situation had become worse. Werdet succumbed under the weight of his publications, dragging down his favourite author in his ruin. Balzac had hours of heavy depression; he went for a rest to Mme. Car-

raud's home at Frapésle, and after his return to Paris he wrote her in the following strain:

"I am horribly embarrassed for money. By tomorrow I may not have a care in the world, if the matters that I have in hand turn out well; but then again it is quite possible that I may perish. It is quite dramatic to be always hovering between life and death; it is the life of a corsair; but human endurance cannot keep it up forever."

He sought for new publishers; then, having passed through the crisis of humility, he straightened up once more, his courage was born again, and he undertook a very mysterious journey the goal of which he revealed to no one, aside from Commander Carraud, whom he had let into his secret. He announced only that if he succeeded it would mean a fortune for him and all his family. Balzac borrowed five hundred francs and left Paris in March, 1836, arriving on the 20th in Marseilles, and on the 26th in Ajaccio, where, his incognito having been betrayed by a former fellow student, he was royally entertained by the younger genera-

tion; and on April 1st he set out for Sardinia in a small sloop propelled by oars. What was the object of this journey? During a stay in Genoa in 1837 a merchant of that city had told him that whole mountains of slag existed near the silver mines which the Romans had worked in Sardinia. This information had set Balzac's spirit of deduction to working, and, assuming that the ancients were very ignorant in the art of reducing ores and had probably abandoned enormous quantities of silver in the slag, had asked his Genoese friend to send him some specimens to Paris.

Landing at Alghiero, he explored Sardinia, saw the mountains of slag and, returning to Genoa on the 22d, had the discomfiture of learning that his Genoese friend, instead of sending him the requested specimens, had adopted the idea himself and had obtained from the court of Turin the right to develop the project in conjunction with a firm in Marseilles which had assayed the ore. All Balzac's hopes of making his fortune once more crumbled to pieces; yet he refused to succumb, but, at the

same time that he wrote the bad news to Laure, announced that he had hit upon something better! Such was his unconquerable optimism. He returned by way of Milan, where he remained several weeks, attending to some business matters for the Visconti family, and, far from his "phrase-shop," he indulged in bitter reflections. At the age of thirty-nine his debts amounted to two hundred thousand francs, he had resorted to every means to clear himself, and, weary of so many useless efforts, he ceased to look forward to a day of liberation.

But he missed his routine of exhausting labour, he sighed for his table, his candles, his white paper; he wanted to get back to his feverish nights, his days of meditation, in his secluded and silent workroom where, better than anywhere else, all his heroic personages quivered into being, and he beheld all the various lives of his creation with a bitter, almost terrible joy. He returned to Paris during the first half of June, lamenting: "My head rèfuses to do any intellectual work; I feel that it is full

of ideas, yet it is impossible to get them out; I am incapable of concentrating my thoughts, of compelling them to consider a subject from all its sides and then determine its development. I do not know when this imbecile condition will pass off, perhaps it is only that I am out of practice. When a workman has left his tools behind him for a time his hand becomes clumsy; it has, so to speak, undergone a divorce from them; he must needs begin again little by little to establish that fraternity due to habit and which binds the hand to the implement and the implement to the hand." But his discouragement did not last long, for he soon has his implement in hand again, with a stronger grip on it than ever.

CHAPTER VIII

AT LES JARDIES

IT was in 1835 that Balzac conceived the idea of acquiring some land, situated between Sèvres and Ville-d'Avray, for the purpose of building a house. He wished in this way to give a guarantee to his mother, evade compulsory service in the National Guard, and become a landed proprietor. He had explored all the suburbs of Paris before deciding upon a hillside with a steep slope, as ill adapted to building as to cultivation. But, having definitely made his choice, he acquired sections from the adjacent holdings of three peasants, thus obtaining a lot forty square rods in extent, to which he naturally hoped to add later on. He calculated that he would not have to spend more than twenty-five thousand francs, which he could borrow,—in point of fact, the total cost came to more than ninety thousand,—and

that the interest to be paid would not come to more than the rent he was then paying for his apartment. The first step was to surround his property with walls, and Balzac then christened it with the name of *Les Jardies*. He laughed with sheer contentment, foreseeing himself in his mind's eye already installed in his own abode, far from Paris and yet near to it, and beyond the reach of importunate visitors and the curiosity of cheap journalism. Nevertheless, *Les Jardies* cost him as much sarcasm and ridicule as his monstrous walking-stick set with turquoises. He had given his own plans to his architects, and he himself attentively superintended his contractors and masons. He experienced all the annoyances incident to construction, delays in the work, disputes with the workmen, the worry of raising money and meeting payments, and the impossibility of obtaining exactly what he wished. He was impatient to take possession of his own home, but the completion of it was delayed from month to month; it was to have been ready for occupancy by November 30, 1837, yet on his return

from Sardinia in June, 1838, it was not yet finished. But he was so eager to move in that in defiance of his physician's orders he installed himself in August, in the midst of all the confusion and with the workmen still all around him. It was a dreadful condition of things, the upturned ground, the empty chambers, the chill of new plaster, and an irritating sense of things not finished and pushed along in haste; but he was exultant, and distracted his own attention by admiring the beauty of the surrounding landscape.

How delightful it was to live at *Les Jardies!* It required not more than ten minutes to reach the heart of Paris, the Madeleine, and it cost but ten sous. The Rue des Batailles and the Rue Cassini were at the other end of the world, and you must needs spend a couple of francs for the shortest drive which wasted an hour,—such was the fashion in which Balzac dreamed! And he would gaze at his acre of ground, bare, ploughed-up clay, without a tree or a blade of grass, and he found no trouble in transforming it mentally into an eden of "plants, fragrance

and shrubbery." He planned to fill it with twenty-year magnolias, sixteen-year lindens, twelve-year poplars, birches and grape vines which would yield him fine white grapes the very next year. And then he would earn thirty thousand francs and buy two more acres of land, which he would turn into an orchard and kitchen-garden.

The house which was the object of so many witticisms was a small three-storied structure, containing on the ground floor a dining-room and parlour, on the next a bed-chamber and dressing-room, and on the upper floor Balzac's working-room. A balcony supported by brick pillars completely surrounded the second story, and the staircase—the famous staircase —ascended on the outside of the house. The whole was painted brick colour, excepting the corners, which had stone trimmings.

Behind the house itself, at a distance of some sixty feet, were the outhouses, including, on the ground floor, the kitchen, pantry, bathroom, stables, carriage-house and harness-room; on the floor above an apartment to let, and on

the top floor the servants' quarters and a guest chamber. Furthermore, Balzac had a spring of water on his own grounds!

For months all Paris talked of the staircase at *Les Jardies* which Balzac, great architect that he was, had forgotten to put into the plans for his house. Under the caption, "Literary Indiscretions," the following humorous note appeared in *La Caricature Provisoire:*

"M. de Balzac, after having successively inhabited the four quarters of the globe and the twelve wards of Paris, seems to have definitely transferred his domicile to the midst of an isolated plain, in the outskirts of Ville-d'Avray; he occupies a house which he has had built there for his own particular accommodation by a direct descendant of the marvellous architect to whom the world owes the cathedral of Cologne. This house, in which no doors or windows are to be found, and which is entered through a square hole cut in the roof, is furnished throughout with an oriental luxury of which even the pashas themselves would be incapable of forming an idea. The great novel-

ist's private study has a floor inlaid with young girls' teeth and hung with superb cashmere rugs that have been sent him by all the crowned heads of the universe. As to the furniture, the chairs, sofas and divans, they are one and all stuffed with women's hair, both blonde and brunette, sent to the author of *La Grenadière* by a number of women of thirty who did not hesitate a minute to despoil themselves of their most beautiful adornment,—a sacrifice all the more rare since they have passed the age at which the hair would grow again!"

Balzac removed to *Les Jardies* as soon as the walls of the dwelling had been raised and the floorings laid, and he lived there before there was a piece of furniture in any of the rooms, aside from the few indispensable things. Léon Gozlan has amusingly related the manner in which the novelist supplied their lack by an effort of imagination. He wrote on the walls with charcoal what he intended the interior decoration of his house to be: *"Here a wainscoting of Parian marble; here a stylobate of cedar wood; here a ceiling painted by Eugène*

Delacroix; here an Aubusson tapestry; here a mantelpiece of cipolino marble; here doors on the Trianon model; here an inlaid floor of rare tropical woods."

Léon Gozlan says that "Balzac did not resent pleasantries at the expense of these imaginary furnishings," and he adds, "he laughed as heartily as I, if not more so, the day when I wrote, in characters larger than his own, on the wall of his bed-chamber, which was as empty as any of the others:

"'HERE A PAINTING BY RAPHAEL, BEYOND ALL PRICE, AND THE LIKE OF WHICH HAS NEVER BEEN SEEN.'".

Balzac laughed, but Gozlan did not understand that he found more pleasure in desiring things than in actually possessing them, for in the former case he was limited only by the extent of his own desires, which were almost infinite.

Among the various speculative schemes which Balzac dreamed of, in connection with *Les Jardies,* and which were to make his fortune,—

a dairy, vineyards which were to produce Malaga and Tokay wine, the creation of a village, etc.,—particular mention should be made of his plans for the cultivation of pineapples, which we have upon the authority of Théophile Gautier:

"Here was the project," he tells us, "a hundred thousand square feet of pineapples were to be planted in the grounds of *Les Jardies,* metamorphosed into hothouses which would require only a moderate amount of heating, thanks to the natural warmth of the situation. The pineapples were expected to sell at five francs each, instead of a louis (twenty francs), which was the ordinary price; in other words, five hundred thousand francs for the season's crop; from this amount a hundred thousand francs would have to be deducted for the cost of cultivation, the glass frames, and the coal; accordingly, there would remain a net profit of four hundred thousand, which would constitute a splendid income for the happy possessor,—'without having to turn out a page of copy,' he used to say. This was nothing; Balzac had a

thousand projects of the same sort; but the beautiful thing about this one was that we went together to the Boulevard Montmartre to look for a shop in which to sell these pineapples that were not yet even planted. The shop was to be painted black, with gold trimmings, and there was to be a sign proclaiming in enormous letters: PINEAPPLES FROM LES JARDIES.

"However, he yielded to our advice not to hire the shop until the following year, in order to save needless expense."

When the first satisfaction of being a landed proprietor had passed, Balzac realised that he had added a new burden to those he already carried, and he confided to Mme. Carraud: "Yes, the folly is committed and it is complete! Don't talk of it to me; I must needs pay for it, and I am now spending my nights doing so!" Forty thousand francs had been added to his former debts, to say nothing of all sorts of trouble which *Les Jardies* was still destined to cost him.

In spite of his formidable powers of produc-

tion, which had caused him to be called by Hippolyte Souverain "the most fertile of French novelists,"—a title, by the way, of which he was far from proud,—Honoré de Balzac could not succeed in freeing himself from debt. Nevertheless, between 1836 and 1839 he published: *The Atheist's Mass, The Interdiction, The Old Maid, The Cabinet of Antiques, Facino Cane, Lost Illusions* (1st part); *The Superior Woman* (later *The Employees*), *The Cabinet of Antiques* (2d part), *The House of Nucingen, Splendours and Miseries of Courtezans* (1st part), *A Daughter of Eve, Beatrix, Lost Illusions* (2d part), *A Provincial Great Man in Paris, The Secrets of the Princesse de Cadignan, The Village Curé,* and to these he added in 1840 *Pierrette, Pierre Grassou,* and *A Prince of Bohemia.* His prices had risen, new illustrated editions of his earlier works had been issued, and he was receiving high rates for his short stories, not only from the magazines but from newspapers such as the *Figaro,* the *Presse,* the *Siècle* and the *Constitutionnel;* yet nothing could extinguish his debts, those debts which

he had been so long carrying like a cross. "Why," said he, "I have been bowed down by this burden for fifteen years, it hampers the expansion of my life, it disturbs the action of my heart, it stifles my thoughts, it puts a blight on my existence, it embarrasses my movements, it checks my inspirations, it weighs upon my conscience, it interferes with everything, it has been a drag on my career, it has broken my back, it has made me an old man. My God, have I not paid dearly enough for my right to bask in the sunshine! All that calm future, that tranquillity of which I stand so much in need, all gambled away in a few hours and exposed to the mercy of Parisian caprice, which for the moment is in a censorious mood!"

Balzac now staked all his hopes upon his first play, *Vautrin,* which was about to be produced at the Porte Saint-Martin theatre. From the very outset of his literary career his thoughts had steadily turned to the drama, and his earliest attempt had been that ill-fated *Cromwell,* which had failed so ignominiously when read to his family. Yet this setback had

not definitely turned him aside from the stage; and, while he rather despised the theatre as a means of literary expression, he had never ceased to consider it as the most rapid method of earning money and founding a fortune. All the time that he was writing his *Human Comedy,* one can feel that he was constantly preoccupied with the composition of plays, of which he drafted the scenarios without ever elaborating them. In 1831 he invited Victor Ratier, editor of *La Silhouette,* to collaborate with him, specifying, however, "that it was more a question of establishing a literary porkshop than a reputation"; in 1832 he announced to his mother that he had "taken the step of writing two or three plays for stage production!" and he added, "This is the greatest misfortune which could happen to me; but necessity is stronger than I, and it is impossible to extricate myself in any other way. I shall try to find some one who will do me the service of signing them, so that I shall not need to compromise my own name." Thereafter he conceived successively a *Marie Touchet,* a trag-

edy in prose entitled *Don Philip and Don Carlos,* a farce comedy, *Prudhomme Bigamist,* a drama, *The Courtiers,* written in collaboration with Emmanuel Arago and Jules Sandeau, and a high-class comedy, *The Grande Mademoiselle,* also in collaboration with Sandeau. Then, in 1836, he reverted to *Marie Touchet,* and composed *La Gina,* a drama in three acts, and *Richard the Sponge-Hearted.* Finally, in 1839, he wrote for the Renaissance Theatre *The School of Married Life,* with the obscure aid of Lassailly, a five-act play for which he was offered an award of six thousand francs, and which he himself produced in print. But it was never performed, in spite of many promises.

This first unsuccessful attempt at stage production discouraged him at first, yet he never gave up his determination to succeed. He prepared a second play, intending to ask Théophile Gautier to collaborate with him; this second play was *Vautrin.*

The first performance of *Vautrin* took place March 14, 1840. Balzac expected that this

play would bring him in at least six thousand francs. Tickets had been greatly in demand, and speculators had so completely cornered them that the audience, composed largely of the author's friends, could not obtain them at the box office. It was a tumultuous evening, and one would have to go back to the great opening nights of Victor Hugo in order to find a parallel case of hostile demonstrations. Frédérik Lemaître, who played the rôle of Jacques Collin, had conceived the idea of making himself up to resemble Louis Philippe. The King of France, far from being pleased at seeing himself masquerading as a bandit, suppressed the play, which consequently had only the one performance. It was a disaster, but Balzac bore up valiantly under it. Léon Gozlin, who called upon him at *Les Jardies* on the very day when the royal interdiction reached him, relates that he talked of nothing else but his plans for improving his property. Balzac's friends, headed by Victor Hugo, tried to use their influence with the government officials, but the latter were powerless to do otherwise

than to confirm the order of Louis Philippe; the royal edict had been imperative. The government offered to pay Balzac an indemnity, but he proudly refused.

A few months prior to the production of *Vautrin,* Balzac, then at the height of his financial difficulties and literary labours, had nevertheless courageously undertaken the defense of a man accused of murder whom he believed to be innocent. This act was in accordance with his conception of his duty as a citizen, and it bore witness to his generosity and sense of justice. The case in question was that of a certain notary, Peytel by name, of Belley, who was accused of the premeditated murder of his wife and man-servant. Balzac had had a slight acquaintance with him in 1831, at the time when Peytel was part owner of the *Voleur,* to which Balzac contributed. This acquaintance had sufficed him to judge of the man's character and to conclude that he was incapable of the double crime with which he was charged. Regardless of his own most pressing interests, Balzac, accompanied by Gavarni,

set out for Bourg, where the trial and sentence of death had already taken place. He saw the condemned man, and the conversations which they had together still further strengthened his opinion. This opinion he set forth in a *Comment on the Peytel Case,* which the *Siècle* published in its issues of September 15-17, 1839, and with a compelling force of argument and a fervent eloquence he demonstrated the innocence of the unfortunate notary. Nevertheless, the Court of Cassation found no reason for granting a new trial, and Peytel was executed at Bourg, October 28, 1839. This was a bitter blow to Balzac, who had believed that he could save him. Furthermore, his efforts and investigations had cost him ten thousand francs!

This was a cruel loss, both in time and in money. His novels were not bringing him in a hundredth part of what he estimated that he ought to be earning, in view of his extraordinary rate of production. He placed the blame upon the unauthorised Belgian reprints, which, according to his calculations, had robbed him of more than a million francs. Literary works

were not at that time properly protected, and it was the province of the Society of Men of Letters to demand from the Government an effective defense against the "hideous piracy" of foreign countries. Balzac was admitted to the Society in 1839,—although with no small difficulty, for he had many enemies, and received only fifty-three votes, while forty-five were necessary for election,—but it was not long before he had made his influence felt and had been chosen as a member of the committee. Léon Gozlan, who served with him, acknowledged his influence. "Balzac," he wrote, "brought to the Society a profound, almost diabolical knowledge of the chronic wretchedness of the profession; a rare and unequalled ability to deal with the aristocrats of the publishing world; an unconquerable desire to limit their depredations, which he had brooded over on the Mount Sinai of a long personal experience; and, above all else, an admirable conviction of the inherent dignity of the man of letters."

It was Balzac's ambition to form a sort of

authors' league, under the direction of "literary marshals," of whom he should be the first, and including in its membership all the widely scattered men of letters, banded together in defense of their material and moral interests. He himself set an example by requesting the support of the Society against a little sheet entitled *Les Écoles,* which had libelled him in a cartoon in which he was represented in prison for debt, wearing his monkish robe and surrounded by gay company. The cartoon bore the following legend: *"The Reverend Father Séraphitus Mysticus Goriot, of the regular order of the Friars of Clichy, at last taken in by those who so long have been taken in by him."* This was in September, 1839, and on the 22d of the following October Balzac appeared as the representative of the Society of Men of Letters before the trial court of Rouen, in an action which it had begun against the *Mémorial de Rouen,* for having reprinted certain published matter without permission. But he did not limit himself to a struggle from day to day, to discussions in committee meetings, to appeals

to the legislature,—his ambition was to become himself the law-maker for writers. In May, 1840, two months after the disastrous failure of *Vautrin,* he offered to the consideration of the Society of Men of Letters a *Literary Code,* divided into titles, paragraphs, and articles, in which he laid down the principles from which to formulate practical rules for the protection of the interests of authors, and for the greater glory of French literature.

Having been appointed a member of the Committee of Official Relations, a committee which had been created at his suggestion for the purpose of seeing that men of letters should exercise a just influence over the government, Balzac drew up, in 1841, some highly important *Notes to be submitted to Messieurs the Deputies constituting the Committee on the Law of literary Property.* But that same year, after having worked upon a *Manifesto* which the Committee was to present to the ruling powers, he handed in his resignation from the Society, on the 5th of October, and it was found impossible to make him reconsider

his decision. It may be that he had received some slight which he could not forgive, or perhaps he had decided that it was to his interest to retain in his own name the right to authorise the republication of his works.

At this period he had attained that supremacy of which he had formerly dreamed in his humble mansarde chamber in the Rue Lesdiguières, and he wished to have it crowned by some sort of official recognition. He made up his mind to present himself for election to the Académie Française, in December, 1839, but withdrew in favour of the candidacy of Victor Hugo, notwithstanding that the latter begged him, in a dignified and gracious message, not to do so.

An intercourse which, without being especially cordial, was fairly frequent had been established between these two great writers as a result of their joint labours on the committee of the Society of Men of Letters. During the month of July, 1839, Victor Hugo breakfasted with Balzac at *Les Jardies*, in company with Gozlan, for the purpose of discussing the great

project of the *Manifesto*. Gozlan, who formed the third member of this triangular party, has left the following delectable account of the interview:

"Balzac was picturesquely clad in rags; his trousers, destitute of suspenders, parted company with his ample fancy waistcoat; his down-trodden shoes parted company with his trousers; his necktie formed a flaring bow, the points of which nearly reached his ears, and his beard showed a vigorous four days' growth. As for Victor Hugo, he wore a gray hat of a very dubious shade, a faded blue coat with gilt buttons resembling a casserole in colour and shape, a much frayed black cravat, and, as a finishing touch, a pair of green spectacles that would have delighted the heart of the head clerk of a country sheriff, enemy of solar radiation!"

They made the circuit of the property, and Victor Hugo remained politely cold before the dithyrambic praises which Balzac lavished on his garden. He smiled only once, and that was at sight of a walnut tree, the only tree that the

owner of *Les Jardies* had acquired from the community.

Victor Hugo had revealed to him the enormous profits that he drew from his dramatic writings, and it is easy to believe that Balzac's persistent efforts to have a play produced were due to this momentary glimpse of a steady stream of wealth that was thus flashed before his dazzled eyes. After the catastrophe of *Vautrin,* he still pursued his dramatic ambitions with *Pamela Giraud* and *Mercadet,* but failed to find any theatre that would consent to produce them. What was worse, the year 1840 was, beyond all others, a frightful one for Balzac. He faced his creditors like a stag at bay; and all the while he found the burden of *Les Jardies* becoming constantly heavier. The walls surrounding the property had slipped on their clay foundation and broken down, while Balzac himself had sustained a serious fall on the steep slopes of his garden, and had consequently lost more than a month's work. Furthermore, he underwent imprisonment at Sèvres for having refused to take

his turn at standing guard over his neighbours' vineyards.

In his distress he thought seriously of expatriating himself and setting out for Brazil; and, before coming to a final decision, he awaited only the success or failure of a publishing venture such as he had already undertaken in vain. In the month of July, 1840, he started the *Revue Parisienne,* of which he was the sole editor, and through which he proclaimed a dictatorial authority over the arts and letters, society and the government. He had to abandon it after the third number.

Balzac remained in France, but he was obliged to quit *Les Jardies.* His creditors looked upon this property as their legitimate prey, and neither ruse nor sacrifice could any longer keep it from them. He first made a fictitious sale of it to his architect, and then a real one, on the advice of his lawyer. It had cost him more than ninety thousand francs, and he got back only seventeen thousand five hundred. But he had lived there through some beautiful dreams and great hopes.

CHAPTER IX

IN RETIREMENT

UPON leaving *Les Jardies,* Balzac took refuge in the village of Passy, at No. 19, Rue Basse,* and there buried himself. It was there that he meant to make his last effort and either perish or conquer destiny. Under the name of M. de Brugnol he had hired a small one-story pavilion, situated in a garden and hidden from sight by the houses facing on the street. His address was known only to trusted friends, and it was now more difficult than ever to discover him. And his life as literary galley-slave was now burdened, in this solitude, with new and overwhelming tasks.

In the midst of the stormy tumult of money troubles and creative labour there was only one single gleam of calm and tender light. In No-

* Thanks to M. de Royaumont, this building has become the Balzac Museum, similar to that of Victor Hugo at Paris, and of Goethe at Frankfort.

vember, 1840, he formed the project of going to Russia, and promised himself the pleasure of joining the Comtesse de Hanska at St. Petersburg for two long months. This hope, which he clung to with all the strength of his ardent nature, was not to be realised until 1843, for his departure was delayed from day to day through his financial embarrassment and unfulfilled contracts with publishers.

Shutting himself into his writing den, a small narrow room with a low ceiling, he proceeded to finish *The Village Curé* and *The Diaries of Two Young Brides;* he began *A Dark Affair* for a journal called *Le Commerce, The Two Brothers,* later *A Bachelor's Establishment,* for *La Presse; Les Lécamus,* for *Le Siècle; The Trials and Tribulations of an English Cat,* for one of Hetzel's publications, *Scenes from the Private and Public Life of Animals;* he worked upon *The Peasants* and wrote *Ursule Mirouet,*—altogether more than thirty thousand lines in the newspaper columns, in less than one year!

Meanwhile his business affairs, so entangled





THE DEATH OF BALZAC

Above: The house in the Rue Fortunée (now Rue Balzac), in which Balzac died August 18, 1850. *Below:* The famous novelist on his death bed, by Eugène Giraud.

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that he himself hardly knew where he stood, in spite of a portfolio bound in black in which he kept his promissory notes and every other variety of commercial paper,—and which he called his *Comptes Mélancoliques* (his *Melancholy Accounts*), adding that they were not to be regarded as a companion volume to his *Contes Drolatiques* (his *Droll Tales*),—began to assume some sort of order, thanks to the efforts of his lawyer, M. Gavault, who had undertaken to wind them up. Balzac remained as poor as ever, for he had to turn over to M. Gavault all the money he took in, aside from what he needed for the strict necessities of life. He admitted proudly that at this period there were times when he contented himself with eating a single small roll on the Boulevard, and that he had gone for days together with one franc as his sole cash on hand.

But a new edition was soon destined to put him on his feet, enable him to liquidate a portion of his floating debt and to pay back some of his biggest loans. An agreement had been formed between Furne, Dubochet, Hetzel and

Paulin to bring out an edition of his complete works under the glorious and definitive title of *The Human Comedy.* But it meant a vast amount of work, all his older volumes to revise and new ones to write,—a task that he estimated would require not less than seven years to finish. If he had produced thirty thousand lines in 1841, he calculated that he was bound by his contracts to produce not less than forty thousand in 1842, not counting the work of correcting proofs of all the new editions of his published stories.

His mental powers were as fertile as ever, but his bodily strength, despite his robust constitution, sometimes broke down under the prodigious fever of creation. Balzac's physician, Dr. Nacquart, obliged him to take a rest. "I am ill," he wrote at this time. "I have been resting all through the latter part of May (1841) in a bathtub, taking three-hour baths every day, to keep down the inflammation which threatened me, and following a debilitating diet, which has resulted in what, in my case, amounts to a disease, namely, emptiness

of the brain. Not a stroke of work, not an atom of strength, and up to the beginning of this month I have remained in the agreeable condition of an oyster. But at last Dr. Nacquart is satisfied and I am back at my task and have just finished *The Diaries of Two Young Brides* and have written *Ursule Mirouet,* one of those privileged stories which you are going to read; and now I am starting in on a volume for the Montyon prize." *

Every one of Balzac's novels cost him unimaginable and never ending toil. After having brooded over his subject, planned the situation, characterised his personages, and decided upon the general philosophy that he intended to express, there followed the task of translating all that he had conceived and thought into an adequate literary form. Balzac often proceeded in bursts of enthusiasm, flashes of illumination, and in a few nights would map out the entire scenario of a whole novel. This first effort was in a certain sense the parent-cell,

* *Letters to a Foreign Lady,* Vol. I, p. 560, Letter of June-July, 1841.

which little by little gathered to itself the elements necessary for the final composition of the work. The proof sheets sent to Balzac always had broad margins, and it is not too much to say that he amplified the initial draft as though he were attaching the muscles and tendons to the bones of a skeleton; then one set of proofs followed another, while he imparted to his story a network of veins and arteries and a nervous system, infused blood into its veins and breathed into it his powerful breath of life,—and all of a sudden there it was, a living, pulsating creation, within that envelope of words into which he had infused the best that he possessed in style and colour. But he suffered bitter disillusions when the work was finally printed; the creator never found his creation sufficiently perfect. Balzac suffered with all the sensibility of his artistic conscience from blemishes which he regarded as glaring faults, and which he followed up and corrected with unparalleled ardour. He was aided in this task by Mme. de Berny, his sister Laure, Charles Lemesle and Denoyers; and he himself, a lit-

erary giant, who did not hesitate to write to Mme. Carraud that his work was in its own line a greater achievement than the Cathedral at Bourges was in architecture, spent whole days in shaping and reshaping a phrase, like some sublime mason who—by a prodigy—had built a cathedral single-handed and whose heart bled upon discovering a neglected carving in the shadow of some buttress and expended infinite pains to perfect it, although it was almost invisible amidst the vastness and the beauty of the whole structure.

Accordingly his work became steadily more laborious to Balzac, and from time to time we can hear him grumbling and groaning; we can see him at his task, his broad face contracted, his black eyes bloodshot, his skin bathed in perspiration and showing dark, almost greenish, in the candle-light, while his whole body trembled and quivered with the unseen effort of creation. His fatigue was often extreme; the use of coffee troubled his stomach and heated his blood; he had a nervous twitching of the eyelids, and suffered from painful shortness of

breath and a congested condition of the head that resulted in over-powering somnolence.

But he rallied and his will power dominated illness itself and imposed his own rules upon his overstrained body. At the same time he dreamed of a calmer life, he pictured the delights of bucolic days and longed to know when this driving slavery was to end. Accordingly we find him consulting a sorcerer, a reader of cards, the celebrated Balthazar, in regard to his future. He was amazed to find how much of his past this man was able to reveal to him, a past made up of struggles and of obstacles overcome, and he joyously accepted predictions that assured him victory. Balzac was superstitious, not in a vulgar way, but through a deep curiosity in the presence of those mysteries of the universe which are unexplained by science. He believed himself to be endowed with magnetic powers; and, as a matter of fact, the irresistible effect of his words, the subtle force which emanated from his whole personality are confirmed by his contemporaries. He believed in telepathy, he held that two beings who love

each other, and whose sensibilities are in a certain degree in harmony, are able, even when far apart, mutually to respond to emotions felt by the one or the other. He consulted clairvoyants as to the course of diet to be followed by Mme. Hanska, and gravely communicated their replies to her, urging her to follow their advice. Occurrences apparently quite trivial troubled him profoundly, and he was anxious for several days because he had lost a shirt-stud given him by Mme. de Berny and could not determine what could be the meaning of the loss. His sorcerer had predicted that he would shortly receive a letter which would change the entire course of his life, and, as a confirmation of his clairvoyance, Mme. de Hanska announced a few months later the death of her husband, M. de Hanski, which permitted Balzac to indulge in the highest hopes.

This event brought him an access of fresh courage, for in order to make the journey to St. Petersburg it was essential that he should first achieve a triumph, brief, brilliant and complete. He decided once again to make a bold

attempt at the theatre, and the scene of battle was to be the Odéon. He offered *The Resources of Quinola* to the manager, Lireux, who accepted it with enthusiasm. Balzac read his comedy to its future interpreters,—notwithstanding that he had as yet written only four acts of it,—and calmly informed them that he would have to tell them the general substance of the fifth. They were amazed at such bold disregard of professional usages, but it was passed over, for Lireux was all impatience to produce *The Resources* and to begin the rehearsals.

Warned by the failure of *Vautrin,* Balzac took the most minute care in arranging for the opening night audience which he relied upon to sweep *Quinola* heavenward on a mounting wave of glory. To begin with, he did away with the *claqueurs* and fixed the price of admission at five francs, while the general scale of prices was as follows: balcony seats twenty-five francs, stalls twenty francs, seats in the open boxes of the first tier twenty-five francs, open boxes of the second tier twenty francs,

closed boxes of the second tier twenty-five francs, baignoir boxes twenty francs. He had no use for mere nobodies, but determined to sift out his audience from amongst the most distinguished men and women in all Paris, ministers, counts, princesses, academicians, and financiers. He included the two Princesses Troubetskoi, the Countess Léon, the Countess Nariskine, the Aguados, the Rothschilds, the Doudeauvilles, the Castries, and he decided that there should be none but pretty women in the front seats of the open boxes. And he counted upon piling up a fine little surplus, since the revenues of the box-office were in his hands for the first three nights. Alas, on the night of March 19, 1842, *The Resources of Quinola* met with the same reception as *Vautrin* had done before it; in spite of all his precautions, his enemies had gained admission to the Odéon, and throughout the whole evening, from the first act onward, there was a ceaseless storm of hisses and cat-calls. He had wasted four months, only to arrive at another defeat.

And all the while his financial difficulties

were becoming keener, more pressing, more imminent, and Balzac, overburdened, recapitulated his disasters as follows: the *Chronique de Paris,* the Trip to Sardinia, the *Revue Parisienne* and *Vautrin;* nevertheless he proudly squared his shoulders. "My writings will never make my fortune until the time comes when I shall no longer be in need of a fortune, for it takes twenty-five years before a success begins to pay, and fifty years before a great achievement is understood." And he returned to his work! His *Complete Works* were now published, for which he had written a "Foreword," summing up his method, his art and his idea; he composed *Albert Savarus,* in order "to respond with a masterpiece to the barkings of the press"; he completed *The Peasants, The Two Brothers* (later *A Bachelor's Establishment*), he wrote *The Pretended Mistress, A Début in Life,* which appeared in *La Législature, David Séchard, The Evil Doings of a Saint, The Love of Two Beasts;* he began *The Deputy from Arcis* and *The Brothers of Consolation;* he dreamed of bringing out a new edition—and

we know the labour that new editions cost him!—of *Louis Lambert* and *Séraphita;* and, lastly, he corrected three volumes of the *Comédie Humaine!*

Living as a recluse at Passy, shut up in his working room with its hangings of red velvet, seated at his table, with one shapely hand supporting his massive head and his eyes fixed upon a miniature reproducing the somewhat opulent contours of Mme. Hanska's profile, and hence straying to an aquarelle representing the château at Wierzchownia, Balzac interrupted his proof correcting to forget his weariness in golden dreams: It was impossible that he should fail to be elected to the Académie Française—which would mean two thousand francs—hereupon he smiled—he was sure of being appointed a member of the dictionary committee—six thousand francs more—his smile broadened—and why should he not become a member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres and its permanent secretary?—another six thousand francs—total, fourteen thousand!—and laughing his vast sonorous laugh—in view

of this assured and honourable position—Balzac made plans for a prompt marriage with his far-off and long-awaited bride.

But his dreams were of short duration. There was no end of ink-stained paper which had to be inked still further, for without money there could be no journey to St. Petersburg. And then there were losses of time, which he regretted but could not avoid, such as having to pose for David of Angers, who was modelling his monumental bust; having to take long walks, in order to keep down his growing corpulence; and inviting a few friends to *Le Rocher de Cancale,* Victor Hugo and Léon Gozlan, in order to entertain a Russian, M. de Lenz, who wished to meet him,—a sumptuous and lively dinner which cost him a hundred and twenty francs,—a sum which he naturally had to borrow, and with no small difficulty!

After alternating between hope and despair, Balzac set forth by way of Dunkerque for St. Petersburg, where he arrived July 29, 1843, not returning to Paris until the 3rd of November. This was his fourth meeting with Mme.

Hanska in the space of ten years, and the first since the death of M. de Hanski.* Balzac was happy and irresponsible, he laughed his deep, resounding laugh of joyous days, that laugh which no misfortune could quite extinguish. He was carefree and elated, and found the strength to write a short story, *Honorine,* without taking coffee. He indulged in jests; the Emperor of Russia, he declared, valued him to the extent of thirty-two roubles, for that was the cost of his permit of residence. And heart and soul he gave himself up to his dear Countess Hanska.

Balzac's trip to Russia was the source of numerous legends. It was said that he went for the purpose of asking the Czar to authorise him to write a work that should be to a certain extent official, for the purpose of refuting M. de Custine's *Russia in 1839,* and that, having demanded an audience in too cavalier a tone, he was ordered to regain the frontier by the shortest possible route. Others related that he

*Hanski is the masculine form for Hanska. (*Translator's Note.*)

had gone there in pursuit of a princess whom he was bent upon marrying.

The return trip was made in short stages through Germany and Belgium, and Balzac stayed over long enough in Berlin, Dresden and Liège to become acquainted with these cities and their museums. But he had no sooner arrived in Paris than he was attacked with inflammation of the brain, and Dr. Nacquart put him on a very strict régime. In Paris he once again found his tasks and his financial difficulties faithfully awaiting him, and, faithful in his turn, he set to work again with true "Balzacian fury." But now a new element had entered into his life: his marriage to Mme. Hanska, although still far distant, and dependent upon chance, was at least a settled question, and he left St. Petersburg taking her formal promise with him. Consequently, whatever the hardships of his existence, his periods of poverty and toil, he was now sustained by the hope of realising a union that had been so long desired, and he strove towards it with all his tenacious energy, as towards a supreme goal. For the

next seven years his every act was designed as a preparation for his marriage, the future organisation of his life, when he should become the husband of the Countess Hanska. He concerned himself with her financial affairs, with the lawsuit brought against her after the death of her husband, with the difficulties arising from a contested inheritance; and from a distance he gave her advice as to the management of her property and the investment of her principal. And at the same time he kept her informed of his efforts to find a home worthy of their happiness, told her of the household furnishings he had bought, and sketched the various scales of domestic and social life which one could live according to the amount of one's income.

These were no longer dreams, practically speaking, but projects for an assured future. Nevertheless, he was still destined to pass through many a disastrous period before the triumph came. In 1843 he was a candidate for the Académie Française, and he had reason to believe that he would be welcomed there with

especial honours. His already extensive achievements, surpassing all contemporary production, were further augmented by *Honorine, The Muse of the Department, Lost Illusions* (part three), *The Sufferings of an Inventor,* a *Monograph on the Parisian Press,* which had aroused great anger, *The Splendour and Misery of Courtezans* (second part), *Modeste Mignon,* and *Madame de la Chanterie* (later *The Seamy Side of Contemporary History*), and there was no other writer who was in a position to dispute the sceptre with him. Nevertheless, legitimate as his candidacy was, he felt the opposition to it, and, realising the cause, he wrote to Nodier, who was supporting him, this proudly sad letter:

"My good Nodier,

"I know to-day so surely that my financial position is one of the reasons for the opposition to my candidacy for the Académie, that I beg you, though with profound regret, not to use your influence in my favour.

"If I am debarred from the Académie by reason of a most honourable poverty, I shall never again present myself in the days when prosperity accords me her favours. I am writing to the same effect

to our friend Victor Hugo, who has been working for me.

"God give you health, my good Nodier."

And, this letter being written, Balzac once more buried himself in his work with such energy that he had a rush of blood to the head, together with such atrocious neuralgic pains that it was necessary to apply leeches. None the less he continued to work, and, if he went out at all, it was for the purpose of visiting his printers or going on the trail of works of art. From the time that the question of his marriage was assured he began an assiduous search for beautiful adornments for his future home, *their home;* and he prided himself on his instinct as a collector and his cleverness as a buyer. He could get the upper hand of the oldest antiquary. He had bought some Florentine furniture worthy of the Louvre, a commode and a writing-desk that belonged to Marie de Médicis, for thirteen hundred and fifty francs—a unique bargain!—and he could sell them again at a profit of thousands of francs if he wished to. Perhaps he would consent to part with the

commode, but he intended to keep the writing-desk and place it between two ebony wardrobes which he already possessed, and it would cost him nothing, because the sale of the other piece, the commode, would cover the entire cost! And although in his letters to Mme. Hanska he defended himself against the charge of prodigality, these "good bargains" still continued. A clock of royal magnificence and two vases of pale green garnet, also Bouchardon's "Christ" in a frame by Brustolone. And for years he continued in pursuit of bric-à-brac, paintings and other works of art. In 1845, on his way home after accompanying Mme. Hanska to Naples, he passed through Marseilles, where he found some Chinese vases and plates at Lazard's curio shop, and, after reaching Paris, he wrote to Lazard, ordering some Chinese Horns-of-plenty and some "very fine bookcases ten metres long by three high, richly ornamented or richly carved." And, not content with giving these instructions to the dealer, he wrote to Méry, who had entertained him at Marseilles, explaining what he wanted from

Lazard, and giving the following excellent lesson in the art of bargaining:

"While you are jollying the worthy Lazard, do me the favour of sending from time to time some of your friends to bargain for the two objects in question, and have them always make an offer, some of fifty, others of a hundred, others of twenty-five francs less than yours. After a fortnight of this manœuvring, some fine morning Lazard will let you have them."

And Balzac added a postscript to this little lesson in the fine art of bargaining: "Never become a collector, for if you do you give yourself into the keeping of a demon as exacting and jealous as the demon of gambling." But while warning his friends against his own ruling passion he surrendered himself to it with passionate delight. During his leisure hours he wandered at random through Paris, like a hunter on the trail of his quarry,—through Paris which he knew down to the remotest of its back alleys and which he loved even in its slums. When he ran across some rare and precious piece, or something that merely appealed to his

individual taste, he derived an intense joy out of employing all his trickery, his readiness of speech, his persuasive powers, to beat down the price of the coveted object. It was a battle in which he chose to come out conqueror. It pleased him to be recognised as a man with the business instinct; and he threw out his chest when he repeated the remark of his publisher, Souverain, "M. de Balzac is better at figures than Rothschild!"

In 1846, during a new trip to Italy with Mme. Hanska, her daughter Anna and the latter's husband, Count Georges Mniszech, he ransacked all Naples, Rome and Genoa, and no longer confined his attention to furniture and bric-à-brac, but had his eye open for paintings as well, because his latest ambition was to found a gallery. This taste for paintings came to him rather late in life, for his artistic appreciation had long been limited to the works of Girodet, a taste which called forth many a sarcasm from the far better informed Théophile Gautier. In Rome Balzac purchased a Sebastiano del Piombo, a Bronzino and a Mierevelt,

he hunted up some Hobbemas and Holbeins, he secured a Natoire and a Breughel,—which he decided to sell, as it proved not to be genuine, —for he wanted "pictures of the first rank or none at all"; furthermore, he brought back to Paris a *Judgment of Paris,* attributed to Giorgione, a Greuze,—a sketch of his wife,—a Van Dyck, a Paul Brill, *The Sorceresses,* a sketch of the birth of Louis XIV representing the *Adoration of the Shepherds,* an *Aurora* by Guido, a *Rape of Europa,* by Annibale Carrachio or Domenichino,—and there we have the beginning of his gallery such as he described it in *Cousin Pons.* At the same time he did not neglect other forms of art for the sake of his paintings; he acquired a Saxon dinner service and a set of Dutch furniture from Amsterdam; Mme. Hanska sent him some porcelains from Germany; he sent to Tours for a writing desk and a commode of the Louis XVI period, he bought a bed supposed to have belonged to Mme. de Pompadour and which he intended for his guest chamber, besides a parlour set in carved woodwork, "of the last de-

gree of magnificence," and a dining-room fountain made by Bernard Palissy for Henry II or Charles IX. Little by little he accumulated these marvels, destined to adorn his home after the marriage.

And, in the hope of hastening the date, he made one supreme effort, with his brain as clear and as fertile as in the periods of his most furious production. Between 1844 and 1847 he produced, in addition to the works already mentioned, *The Peasants, The Splendour and Misery of Courtezans* (third part), *Cousin Bette, The Involuntary Comedians, The Last Incarnation of Vautrin, Cousin Pons, The Deputy from Arcis,* and *The Lesser Bourgeoisie.* He foresaw the dawn of his deliverance: he would be able to achieve his gigantic task in peace.

Balzac was fully conscious of his genius and of the greatness of the monument which he had already partly raised. He objected to being classed with the men of letters of his period, and for some time past had claimed recognition as standing on a higher level. Eugène de Mire-

court was witness of a scene which bore evidence to his justifiable pride:

"It was during the winter of 1843," he wrote, "that Messrs. Maulde and Renon published a *Picture of the Great City,* which was edited by Marc Fournier, the present manager of the Port-Saint-Martin theatre.

"One evening Balzac entered the publishers' office and said:

" 'Our agreement, gentlemen, was that I should be paid for my *Monograph on the Parisian Press* at the rate of five hundred francs a page.'

" 'That is so,' they replied.

" 'I have received only fifteen hundred francs and there are four pages; accordingly you still owe me five hundred francs.'

" 'But your corrections, M. de Balzac! Have you any idea what they amounted to?'

" 'There was nothing said about my paying for corrections.'

" 'That is true,' replied M. Renon, 'but I ought to tell you that Alexandre Dumas's article, *Filles, Lorettes et Courtisanes,* also ran

to four pages, yet we have not given him a centime more than we have given you.'

"Balzac started and turned pale. It is evident that he must have been in great financial need before he would have come to make such a request. But he quite forgot this in the face of the words he had just heard. For, without pressing his claim further, he arose, took his hat and said, with an accent of solemn dignity:

" 'From the moment that you compare me with that negro I have the honour of wishing you good evening!'

"He went out. And that was how the mere name of Alexandre Dumas saved the business office of *The Great City* five hundred francs." *

In order to hasten his liberation from debt and his settlement with creditors, Balzac tried to augment the sums which he received from editors and publishers with the profits from various speculations. He expected a rise in value of the shares which he held in the company of the Chemins de Fer du Nord, and, either trusting to reliable information or else himself

* *Balzac,* by Eugène de Mirecourt, pp. 80-82.

possessing an intimate knowledge of the development of real estate in Paris, he urged Mme. Hanska to invest her capital in land in the Monceau district. He cited the example of Louis-Philippe, who was the cleverest speculator of his time, and who had acquired tracts of immense extent.

After the close of 1846 Balzac retired from the outside world and gave himself up almost entirely to his great work. Through an intermediary he had purchased the residence of the financier, Baujon, in the Rue Fortunée, and with great secrecy he had it repaired and redecorated, with a view to making it habitable at the earliest possible date. Here he deposited his wealth of furnishings,—which had already begun to excite public wonderment, owing to certain indiscreet revelations,—but his life, which had always been closely hidden, had now become practically unknown. He was unwilling to show himself again in public until he could return in triumph after his marriage. Mme. Hanska visited Paris a second time, in 1847, and approved of all his arrangements.

Balzac in return went to Wierzchownia that same year, and he was dazzled by the vastness of her estates,—which were equal in extent to a whole department of France,—and by the possibilities of neglected and undeveloped resources which might be made to yield millions. After his return to Paris he had but one desire: to go back to Wierzchownia, celebrate his marriage, and realise the dream which he had tenaciously pursued for seventeen years.

He remained in Paris six months, living in his new home in the Rue Fortunée, denying himself to all but his most intimate friends, and hiding his prosperity until the day should come when he could announce his good fortune to the world at large. One of the last portraits of Balzac at this period is the one traced by Champfleury, whom he had received as a disciple and fervent admirer:

"M. de Balzac," he wrote, "descended the stairs enveloped in his famous monk's robe. His face is round, his black eyes are excessively brilliant, the general tone of his complexion verges upon olive, with patches of violent red in the

cheeks, and pure yellow towards the temples and around the eyes. His abundant hair is a dense black, intermingled with threads of silver; it is an astonishing head of hair. In spite of the amplitude of his dressing-gown, his girth appears enormous." And, further on, he gives us this second sketch: "but at the age of forty-nine M. de Balzac ought to be painted rather than sculptured. His keen black eyes, his powerful growth of hair intermingled with white, the violent tones of pure yellow and red which succeed each other crudely in his cheeks, and the singular character of the hairs of his beard, all combine to give him the air of a festive wild boar, that the modern sculptors would have difficulty in reproducing."

Arriving in Paris a few days before the Revolution, Balzac witnessed the turbulent scenes of 1848. It is said that he was one of the first to reach the Tuileries, mingling with the excited populace, and he brought away a fragment of the tapestry which covered the throne of Louis-Philippe. He attended an Assembly of Men-of-Letters, which met to decide what their atti-

tude should be towards the provisional government, but he had an absent-minded and detached air, as though he found himself a stranger among all those writers. He found no one he knew, and seemed to be searching for his comrades of earlier days. His frequent journeys outside of France, which began in 1845, his long periods of residence in foreign countries, in company with Mme. Hanska, seemed to have weaned him away from the environment in which he had lived and developed, and fitted him for a different mode of life.

The club of *Universal Fraternity,* in Paris, having placed him upon its list of candidates for the legislative elections, he sent to its president the following public letter, proud and somewhat disillusioned, in reply to the question of a member, who wished to know his political opinions:

"I have already stated that if the functions of a representative were entrusted to me I would accept them. But I thought from the beginning and I still think that it is superfluous for any man whose life and works have been

public property for twenty years to make a profession of faith.

"There are some men whom the votes solicit, and there are others who must solicit votes, and it is the latter who must prove the soundness of their political views. But, as to me, if I have not taken my place, through my writings, amongst the nine hundred individuals who represent in our country either intelligence, or power, or commercial activity, or a knowledge of laws and men and business, the ballot will tell me so!"

But although Balzac had for twenty years had an ambition to hold political office, to be a cabinet minister and have a share in the government, he witnessed the Revolution of 1848 with no other feeling than sorrow, for he felt that it augured no good for France. Besides, at this time he had no other wish than to return to Russia, join Mme. Hanska, and close the great mystery of his life with a glorious marriage. During the few months that he remained in Paris, from February to September, 1848, he showed nothing of his customary liter-

ary activity, and seems to have had no other thought than that of putting his new home in order, and transforming it into a sumptuous abode. And when everything was ready to receive the future bride he set out for Wierzchownia, at the end of September, leaving his home in the care of his mother, with whom he had often had clashes and periods of coldness, yet who had never refused her son a devotion which, although at times somewhat churlish, was based upon a deep affection and a precise recognition of her duties.

Accordingly Mme. de Balzac watched over his interests, just as she formerly did in 1832, when he had gone to Aix in the company of Mme. de Castries; and Balzac sent instructions to her from Russia, but their tone showed an assurance, a certain complete tranquillity, which he had not had in the days of his laborious youth. These instructions related to business ventures which he was thinking of undertaking, —during his first sojourn he had considered the plan of utilising Count Mnizschek's forests by converting them into railway ties,—and now he

wanted her to send him a work by Vicat, treating of mortars and hydraulic cement; then there were orders relating to the care he wished to be given to the final settling of his home,—which cost him not less than four hundred thousand francs. Mme. de Balzac must needs oversee the various contractors, Grohé, the upholsterer, Paillard, who had the contract for furnishing the parlour, Feuchère, the worker in bronze, from whom Balzac wished his mother to order two brackets in gilded copper, while at the same time she was to send him a complete list of all his table silver. He went into the most minute details, which showed his love of order, begging his mother to remind François, one of his servants, *to fill and clean the lamps,* "for that is an essential matter," he insisted. Each of these letters to his mother contains some such trivial recommendation, which goes to show that he had the instinct of a careful housekeeper who hates needless waste.

From Russia he continued to supervise his theatrical interests, and entrusted them, so far as they related to *Mercadet,* to his friend,

Laurent-Jan, while at the same time he protested against a performance of *Vautrin* which he had not authorised. He announced to Laurent-Jan that he was hard at work and was preparing some scenarios for him. He had not renounced the idea of making money through the dramatic branch of his art. For there were times when Mme. Hanska became anxious regarding his personal debts, which were not yet wholly paid off, as well as their mutual debts incurred in relation to their future home and its furnishings. He feared that his mother, who was herself easily alarmed, might write some discouraging news as to his financial position, and in this way alarm the countess. Accordingly he sent her one day a secret letter, through the post-office in Berditcheff, in which he gave her most explicit orders in this connection. For he had now been in Wierzchownia almost twelve months, and his marriage, although ostensibly agreed upon, had not yet taken place, and he knew that in such a case the whole thing might fall through at any time, up to the very moment of the ceremony. As a matter of fact,



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Statue of Balzac, by Falguière, erected in Paris, on the Avenue Friedland.

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he was a sick man, his heart and lungs were both affected, he had lost the last of his teeth, and there were some days when he found it impossible even to move his arms without a sense of suffocation.

Nevertheless his constancy was at last recompensed, after months of despair, during which he said, "I must regard the project which brought me here as *indefinitely postponed.*" In March, 1850, preparations were made for the marriage, and in announcing it to his mother he said that he would notify her of the day of his return, so that she could decorate the rooms with flowers, "*beautiful, beautiful* flowers." And on March 15th he despatched two letters, one to Mme. de Balzac and the other to Laure, in which he announced the event so long delayed. "Yesterday, at Berditcheff, in the parish church of St. Barbara, a delegate of the bishop Jatomir, a saintly and virtuous priest, closely resembling our own Abbé Henaux, confessor of the Duchess of Angoulême, blessed and celebrated our marriage." And he signed the

letter to his sister: "Your brother Honoré, at the pinnacle of happiness!"

The happiness was brief. Balzac seems to have been destined to have a life made up solely of toil and struggles, and at the very moment when he had forced his way out of the jungle of obstacles and superhuman efforts, and had reached that vast plain where travellers along the path of life repose, destiny forbade him any joy. At the moment when he was hoping for happiness, peace, and love, death was at his elbow.

He returned with his wife to Paris towards the end of May, 1850, in a state of exhaustion, and yet full of dreams, projects and hopes,—but only to take to his bed and await his destined hour. Nothing could be more dramatic than his last weeks. He suffered from heart, lungs and liver. Every care was taken of him, and hope was offered of a cure; yet he never rose again. His work had killed him. No one can read without emotion the simple line that he traced on June 20, 1850, on a letter dictated to his wife for Théophile Gautier, who

had called to see him: "I can no longer read nor write!"

Honoré de Balzac died during the night of August 18, 1850, at a time when his beautiful and weary eyes had barely caught a fleeting glimpse of fortune, glory and peace.

Victor Hugo was notified and hurried to his bedside.

"We traversed a corridor," he has recorded, "we ascended a staircase covered with a red carpet and encumbered with works of art, vases, statues, paintings, cabinets containing enamels; then another corridor, and I saw a door standing open. I heard a rattling breath, loud and sinister. I found myself in Balzac's bedroom.

"A bed stood in the middle of the chamber. It was a bed of acacia wood, at the head and foot of which were cross-pieces and straps, apparently forming part of an apparatus for lifting and moving the sick man. M. de Balzac lay in this bed, with his head supported on a pile of pillows, to which had been added some red damask cushions taken from the sofa in the same room. His face was purple, almost black,

and was turned towards the right. He was unshaven, but his gray hair was cut short. His eyes were wide open and staring. I saw him in profile, and, seen thus, he resembled the emperor.

"An old woman, the nurse, and a man-servant were standing, one on each side of the bed. A candle was burning behind the headboard on a table, and another on a commode near the door. On still another table a silver vase had been placed. The man and woman stood silent, listening in a sort of terror to the noisy rattle of the dying man's breath.

"The candle at the head of the bed vividly lighted a portrait of a young man, high coloured and smiling, which hung above the mantle.

"An insupportable odour emanated from the bed. I lifted up the coverlid and took Balzac's hand. It was bathed in sweat. I pressed it, but he did not return the pressure.

"The nurse said to me:

" 'He will die at daybreak.'

"I descended the stairs, carrying away that

livid face in my thoughts; as I crossed the parlour I once again came upon the motionless bust (of Balzac, by David of Angers), impassible, proud and vaguely radiant, and I drew a comparison between death and immortality.

"On reaching my home, as it happened to be Sunday, I found several callers waiting for me, amongst others Riza-Bey, the Turkish chargé d'affaires, Navarrete, the Spanish poet, and Count Arrivabene, an Italian exile. I said to them:

" 'Gentlemen, Europe is about to lose a great mind.'

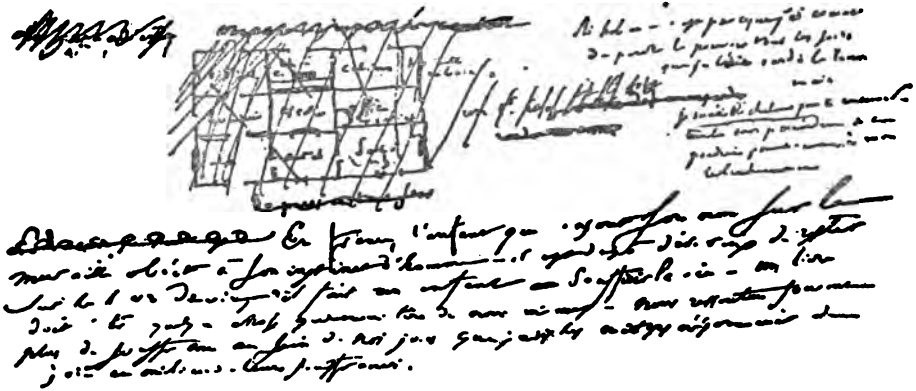
"He died during the night, at fifty-one years of age."

Balzac loved to compare his struggles with the military campaigns of Bonaparte, and to point out that he had conducted them without halt or bivouac, after the manner of the great conqueror. He wished to equal him in glory and to surpass him in the achievements that he should leave behind him for the benefit of future generations. He has recorded his great

desire: "In short, here is the game I am playing; during this present half century four men will have exerted an immense influence: Napoleon, Cuvier, O'Connell, and I should like to be the fourth. The first lived upon the blood of Europe, he inoculated himself with armies; the second espoused the globe; the third was the incarnation of an entire people; as for me, I shall have borne an entire social epoch in my head."

More fortunate than the young Corsican sub-lieutenant, Balzac produced a work possessing a permanence which the other could not have,—since thought is always greater than action,—and although death surprised him before he could lay the last stone of his edifice, its incompleted grandeurs might well suffice the loftiest ambition.

THE END



BALZAC'S HANDWRITING

Page from a note-book in which Balzac recorded his projects and his thoughts.
(Now in possession of M. Barbier.)

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